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# Welcome

***Hello! And welcome to the first book in my fanmade Warriors series, Rise of the Weather! This book is completed , editing and writing! I'm so glad I've finally finished this, and have started working on the second book in the series! Anyways, without further ado, I dearly hope you all enjoy! Thanks for reading!***

**~ Kitt**

***(One last thing — voting and commenting is always appreciated! It helps encourage me to write more, and with more comments/ votes...more books on this series will come out, and the editing with be a lot faster. Thank you! ^w^)***

**This story can also be found at http://aminoapps.com/ p/4wh2h on Warriors Amino**

# Prologue

[image]

**Edited ✔✔**

———————

*The black tabby's eyes* fluttered opened, emitting a soft, orange glow in the den as they reflected the moonlight that dappled through the leaves. His gaze immediately rested on his brother's dark brown pelt, watching his flank gently rise and fall as he slept like a log, completely and utterly forgetful, as per usual. The black tabby smiled as his brother rested in a peaceful doze, his expression kind, yet bittersweet as he gave him a small tap on the side.

"Springedjoint."  He whispered into the darkness, his head lifting into the air for a brief moment as his eyes scanned over the nearly empty den. He prodded his brother some more, his heart twisting as he disturbed the brown tom's dreams. "Springedjoint, wake up." He leaned away as the other tom, younger than the black tabby by only a few minutes, stirred. His paws rubbed sleepily against his muzzle, and he let out a small, exhausted groan.

Stepping away to let his brother rise in his own, the black tabby lifted his ears and let them swivel back and forth, listening carefully for any disturbance to the night's silence. He felt a small rush of warm air disturb his ear fur, and he flicked it in acknowledgement to Springedjoint standing beside him.

"What is it, Darkblaze?" The brown cat mumbled sleepily, his voice slurred with exhaustion and his head lazily turned in the black tabby's direction.

Darkblaze smiled softly, amused as Springedjoint once again let his forgetfulness get the best of him.

"It's moonhigh." He said quietly, his voice level and carefully toned down as to not disturb anybody else. "Tonight is the perfect night to leave; don't you recall?"

Springedjoint's eyes stretched wide, looking like two bright yellow moons as he tried his best to stifle his surprise. "Yes, of course. It's the night of the gathering."

Darkblaze let out a purr of amusement, flicking his tail against Springedjoint's shoulder as he silently exited the den. His eyes cautiously scanned the clearing, and much to his satisfaction, nobody was in sight. He and Springedjoint had agreed upon leaving as the moon reached its highest peak on the night of the gathering, just to ensure that their escape was as uninterrupted as possible, especially with half the clan gone.

Creeping along the edge of the clearing, Darkblaze's dark pelt melted easily with the shadows. Springedjoint was following soundlessly behind him, their carefully executed plan working almost flawlessly. *Almost.*

A figure entered the camp, and Darkblaze went as still as stone. Springedjoint collided with his littermate's rear at his sudden stop, and quickly backed away. Darkblaze's eyes narrowed to slits as he recognized the tom who was disrupting their plans, and felt a chill run along his spine as the gray feline's yellow eyes rested on the brothers at the sudden movement.

"Darkblaze? Springedjoint? Where do you think you two are going?" Pebblewing meowed sharply, approaching the littermates with a cold gaze.

Darkblaze heard Springedjoint shuffle behind him, and the brown tom gave a polite nod to the gray warrior. "We're just making a quick run to the dirtplace." He said quickly, forcing a small smile to curl his lips.

Pebblewing narrowed his eyes suspiciously, but nodded nonetheless. "Hurry up then. Newtstar won't be happy if she finds you two wandering outside the camp." The gray patched tom's eyes flashed dangerously.

Darkblaze nodded, his heart feeling as if it would stop. "Of course, Pebblewing." He murmured.

Turning tail, Darkblaze and Springedjoint hurried into the dirtplace. The hideous stench made Darkblaze's nostrils flare with disgust as he anxiously glanced around.

Springedjoint turned to his brother. If the brown tom was panicking, he wasn't showing it nearly as much as Darkblaze, whose chest rose and fell rapidly.

"There's an emergency escape route just behind here." Springedjoint whispered, his eyes darting around carefully. "It's steep, but if we're fast and careful, we can make it out before Pebblewing will manage to exit the camp."

Darkblaze hesitated for a moment, before nodding his approval. "You're a genius." He said with a smile, giving his brother's cheek a soft nuzzle.

Springedjoint beamed, before padding to the very back of the dirtplace and scanning the wall. Unsheathing his claws, he began to carefully tear away at the brambles. Darkblaze joined his brother, helping dig away until a large hole gaped before them. Being as silent as he possibly could, Darkblaze squeezed through the new exit directly behind Springedjoint, shaking small thorns from his pelt as he emerged from the dirtplace. It wasn't the most pleasant of ways to sneak out, but he knew that if they had gone through the entrance, Pebblewing would be on their tails in an instant. Through the back, the gray tom wouldn't even know of their absence unless he decided to check on them.

Darkblaze furrowed his brow. "Where's the exit?" He asked quietly.

Springedjoint smiled, and nodded to the stone wall of the hollow in front of them. "Up there." He meowed.

Darkblaze followed his brother's gaze. This side of the camp wasn't nearly as steep as the others, small indents in the roughed carved stone where they could get pawholds, and some even big enough to rest on as they gathered their breath. It had never occurred to Darkblaze, but the ragged scoops in the walls of the stone hollow seemed quite unnatural.

Springedjoint took Darkblaze's silence as fear, and gave his littermate a gentle nudge. "If it makes you feel any better, I can go before you." He meowed gently.

Startled, Darkblaze gave a swift shake of his head. "No, no, it's perfectly fine." He assured.

Springedjoint shrugged with a grin. "Whatever. I'm still going first."

Without waiting for his brother's protest, Springedjoint launched himself to the wall, claws unsheathed as he hauled himself upwards, ledge by ledge. Hesitating, Darkblaze scrabbled up behind Springedjoint, rocks from his brother's ascent showering down upon him. Springedjoint made it up in no time, his quick and agile climb looking almost practiced. Unlike his brother, Darkblaze pause on a few ledges multiple times to catch his breath, until he finally reached the top.

Springedjoint grasped Darkblaze's scruff and helped to pull him onto solid ground, waiting patiently with his tail folded over his paws as Darkblaze gulped up lungfuls of air.

"How did you do that so effortlessly?" Darkblaze wheezed, lying flat on his stomach. "It's like you've done this before."

Springedjoint's fur bristled, embarrassment rolling off of him in waves of emotion, a small hint of sadness in the mix. "Oh, I'm just naturally skilled at climbing, I suppose." He said quickly with a forced chuckle, taking care to avoid his littermate's searching gaze.

"Are you sure?" Darkblaze pressed.

Before Springedjoint was given time to respond, a voice disrupted the night.

"Oh, I'm sure it has something to do with that handsome WindClan tom he's been sneaking out to see." Pebblewing sneered, stalking slowly out of the underbrush, his yellow gaze sharp and judging as he looked the two toms over.

Surprise flashed through Darkblaze, and he noticed Springedjoint move to stand in front of him, his eyes glowering at the gray

patched feline in front of them. Darkblaze slowly gathered himself to his feet, still rather out of breath, but knowing what he and Springedjoint had planned to do if they had been caught. Not letting Pebblewing's words get to his head, he gave Springedjoint's shoulder a gentle nudge. The brown tom looked back, and nodded.

Then, they ran.

Darkblaze's hind claws tore into the soil as he propelled himself forward, sending a spray of earth scattering behind him. His breaths came in heaving gasps, but his ears were flat and his eyes narrow with a fierce determination. Springedjoint was already many tail-lengths ahead of him, and a swift glance back told him that Pebblewing was hot on his heels.

Darkblaze watched as his brother stumbled over a gnarled oak root, his tail lashing out for balance. The black tabby brushed his fur against Springedjoint's shoulder in silent reassurance as he streaked past.

The brown tom swiftly regained his pace, darting past the black tabby with ease and agility, while Darkblaze struggled to move quickly and to breath through the crisp air whipping past him.

Suddenly, unsheathed claws sank into Darkblaze's haunches, and he let out a screech as he plummeted towards the ground. The weight of Pebblewing's body pinning him to the earth. Darkblaze managed to twist around and expose his belly, but in doing so he had an advantage. He struggled viciously to escape the gray tom's firm hold, lashing out relentlessly and slicing his claws into the soft fur of Pebblewing's stomach.

The gray tom let out a snarl, and without hesitation he plunged his teeth into Darkblaze's throat, tearing back with flesh and fur. Darkblaze's mouth bubbled with blood, and the scarlet liquid slipped down his chin. His amber eyes quickly glazed over, and immediately, the tabby fell limp.

***

Springedjoint's paws pounded against the earth, each step

thundering in his ears as he darted through the trees. He could no longer sense his brother's presence beside him, and felt a feeling of dread overtake his heart as a shriek filled the night. His paws slithering against the ground as he pulled to a stop, the brown tom turned around to view the sight before him.

Shock and horror filled Springedjoint as Pebblewing tore out his littermate's throat, flesh and blood dripping from the gray tom's jaws.

"*No!"* Springedjoint screamed, leaping forward as tears began to spill from his eyes. He was blinded by fury, and without a second thought he slammed into Pebblewing's side, knocking him into the ferns.

Springedjoint twisted himself around and knelt over Darkblaze's body, sobs wracking through his shoulders as he gently touched his nose to his brother's now cold fur. "Darkblaze? Darkblaze? *Darkblaze, please answer me!"* He wailed.

Pebblewing strode from the undergrowth, a low grow rumbling in his throat as he set his gaze upon the grieving tom. The fur on Springedjoint's scruff bristled, and he rebounded Pebblewing's growl with one of his own.

"You killed my brother." Springedjoint said lowly, venom lacing his words while tears pricked at his eyes. "You're...you're a monster!" Springedjoint streaked forward, a screech rattling in his throat.

The brown tom lashed his claws out at Pebblewing, who ducked just before he could be grazed. Springedjoint stumbled, but whipped around quickly as claws caught on his haunches. Crimson blood already swelling from the wound, he let out a battle cry and charged at Pebblewing. The gray patched tom ducked a moment too late, and the two toms locked into a writing ball of teeth and claw.

Shoving Springedjoint away, Pebblewing let loose a hiss as he folded back his ears. "You traitor!" The gray feline shouted, his tail bushed out.

Springedjoint scoffed, a shadowed look in his eyes. "I am no traitor,

you fool. You killed your own clanmate; my *brother*. I know of so many things you've done, and I will never live with you in line to be leader."

Pebblewing's eyes darkened as realization struck him, before a wicked grin upturned his features. "Oh, sweet Springedjoint. So foolish of you not to have told Newtstar..." he paused, walking towards the brown tom who was standing stiffly,  to daring to make a move. "You know, you are the downfall of ThunderClan."

The gray cat brought his muzzle close to Springedjoint's, his breath billowing onto the tom's face. "You will never escape, Springedjoint...but, you were right about one thing." He hissed. "You *won't* live with me in line to be leader."

Suddenly, before Springedjoint could react, Pebblewing slashed his claws across the warrior's throat, blood spurting from the scratch and spilling onto the ground. The brown tom crumpled onto his brother's body, his yellow eyes glazed over and lifeless. The gray tom's gaze flicked between the two body's, an oddly satisfied gleam to his yellow eyes as he rasped his tongue over a blood soaked paw.

"Now nobody will ever tell my little secret."

# ThunderClan

[image]

**Leader:**

Pebblestar – gray tom with darker spotted markings and deep yellow eyes

**Deputy:**

Littleshine – white she-cat with golden patched markings and a stubby tail, pale orange eyes

**Medicine Cat:**

Leopardstalk – small black tom with darker leopard-like markings, green eyes
*Apprentice: Twigpool*

**Warriors:** *(Toms, and she-cats without kits)*

Quietwish – small tortoiseshell she-cat with yellowish-green eyes
*Apprentice: Mosspaw*

Firesplash – dark ginger she-cat, green eyes

Yellowtuft – cream-yellow tom with tabby and white markings, golden eyes

Snowdrift – white tom with blue eyes

Willowbush – pale ginger she-cat with a white tipped tail and markings, golden eyes

Paleclaw – pale yellow tom with black spots, amber eyes *(Father to Shimmerbranch's kits)*
*Apprentice: Streampaw*

Oaktail – brown tabby tom with a lighter underbelly, yellow eyes

Redspark – reddish-brown tom with black tabby stripes and a white-tipped tail, orange-brown eyes *(Father to Leaningwhisker's kits)*

Ravenheart – black she-cat with white markings, forest green eyes

*Apprentice: Marigoldpaw*

Lilystripe – yellow she-cat with pale brown tabby stripes and spots, amber eyes

Tortoisefoot – black tom with a brown tabby tail and markings, light amber eyes

*Apprentice: Slopepaw*

**Queens:** *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Shimmerbranch – white and silver she-cat *(expecting Paleclaw's kits)*

Leaningwhisker – pale brown she-cat with a twisted foot and black markings, pale green eyes *(mother to Redspark's kits, Splinterkit and Beetlekit)*

**Apprentices:** *(kits older than six moons, in training to become warriors)*

Twigpool – silver tom with gray markings, light blue eyes

Streampaw – beautiful pale gray she-cat with darker gray markings, and honey yellow eyes

Marigoldpaw – brown she-cat with black spots, and strikingly amber eyes

Mosspaw – gray and white tom with amber eyes

Slopepaw – blue-gray tom with silver lining his muzzle and stomach, blue eyes

**Kits:**

Splinterkit – pale white tom-kit with a brown back and red tabby markings, one pale green eye, and one orange eye

Beetlekit – small black tom-kit with brown markings, amber eyes

**Elders:** *(warriors and queens, now retired)*

Thrushpounce – light cream colored tom with ginger markings

**Here is ThunderClan! Just to let you guys know, for this book, the only allegiances will be this clan, because, well...it's the only allegiance needed to be written down so far! Seeya! ^w^**

# Chapter One

[image] [image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Snowdrift's steady blue gaze* rested firmly on the pelt of a nicely sized rabbit. The creature's tiny pink nose quivered, sending vibrations up its whiskers as it careful advanced in the snow, blissfully unaware of the white tom-cat's presence. Mouth watering, Snowdrift crept forward, placing his paws expertly against the snow as to not make any sudden noises to alert his prey. A hiss of frustration and a furious yowl exploded from the underbrush behind Snowdrift, and without a moment to lose, the rabbit bolted, its eyes rounded in horror.

Grinding his teeth together, Snowdrift hared after it, snow spraying into the air as he kicked powerfully with his legs. He cursed beneath his breath as the rabbit darted swiftly to the side. Snowdrift followed, his paws scraping against dirt through the snow which he had scattered. Measuring his distance and knowing that he'd lose any chance to catch the creature if he waited a moment further, he propelled himself into the air, landing with a thump on the rabbit, his claws sinking into its plump haunches. The prey fought to escape, but quickly Snowdrift ended its life with a bite to the neck. Sending his thanks to StarClan, the tom picked up the rabbit and padded back to where he had heard the yowls, his ear flicking irritably.

Mosspaw and Streampaw had revealed themselves from the bush, sitting in the clearing where the rabbit had been spotted, while bickering amongst themselves and threatening the other constantly. Mosspaw swiped his claw over Streampaw's ear, and she snarled in response, rearing onto her hind legs.

Snowdrift cleared his throat, and the two apprentices fell silent, their eyes darting towards the tom.

Hesitantly, Mosspaw raised his voice to a meow. "Er, nice catch." He muttered casually, brushing a forepaw awkwardly against the snow laden ground, however casting a quick scowl to Snowdrift before aiming his gaze back at the snow.

Snowdrift huffed, dropping the freshkill to the ground, the warm taste of it fading steadily from his mouth. "Not as well as I had hoped for it to be." He growled, staring sharply at the gray and white apprentice.

Mosspaw bounced to his paws, his jaw parted in frustration. "Why are you looking at me?" He demanded, tail lashing. "It's Streampaw's fault!" He glared at his sister, his green eyes burning with accusation.

"Was not!" Streampaw retorted, plopping back down into a sitting position.

Mosspaw parted his jaws to respond, but was interrupted by Snowdrift's tail swiping across his muzzle. The apprentice sneezed, before returning his glare to Snowdrift.

"Mosspaw," the white tom growled, his tail whipping lightly back and forth. "It was you, who as far as I can tell provoked your sister, so it is you who must be punished. Now, get back to camp."

Mosspaw stomped his foot against the ground. "That's so unfair!" He whined, sticking his muzzle in the air. Snowdrift silenced the apprentice with a glare, before the tom whipped around and stormed back to camp.

The white tom then turned to Streampaw, his gaze stern as he locked eyes with her. "Now, Streampaw..." he began, his voice softening and the muscles in his face relaxing to a smile. "Be more careful with your brother, he's a nuisance and can get you in major trouble with the clan."

Streampaw's gray head bobbed up and down in an enthusiastic nod. "Of course, Snowdrift!" She purred.

Snowdrift gave a satisfied smile. In the past quarter moon,

Streampaw and Mosspaw's mentors became infected with greencough. Pebblestar had entrusted Snowdrift with the privilege to teach the two any extra information on their apprenticeship before they became warriors. It had honestly startled the tom since he was hardly even a warrior himself, however he did understand Pebblestar's intentions. He flicked his tail, and returned to Streampaw.

"Now, lets test your hunting skills." Snowdrift began. He tasted the air, sniffing for prey. *There.* He padded along swiftly, the scent of squirrel heavy on his tongue, until finally, he spotted the grayish-brown shape scuffling along, digging its tiny paws into the ground as it scavenged for food. Snowdrift twitched his tail, beckoning Streampaw to come over. The apprentice did as she was ordered, lowering down into a crouch next to the warrior.

Snowdrift silently observed Streampaw's hunter crouch. Satisfied, he gave a brisk and hardly noticeable nod. Streampaw's eyes flicked from Snowdrift over to the squirrel, and she responded by flicking her tail over Snowdrift's flank. Finally, she slunk forward, making sure that the wind was flowing towards herself. At a close distance, she streaked towards her prey. The squirrel let out a startled squeal, and made for the nearest tree. It's paws scrabbled at the bark as it raced up the trunk, but it was too late, for Streampaw had dug her claws into its tail. She dragged the squirrel towards herself and finished it off with a blow to the spine, a smile crawling onto her face as she plucked it up from the snowy ground.

Confidently, the she-cat pranced back over to Snowdrift, dropping the squirrel beside the rabbit.

"How's this?" She purred, blinking at the white tom.

Snowdrift looked at the squirrel, comparing it to normal prey in leafbare weather. "It's plump." He acknowledged, pride swelling in his chest. "Much better than any other prey our clan has caught this season." Streampaw beamed.

"Great!" She chirped, her large tail swiping into the air. "Let's head to camp, shall we?" She plucked the squirrel from the ground, and began advancing in the direction of the hollow. Snowdrift did the

same, his teeth sinking into the fur of the rabbit. He frowned lightly, realizing that his prey was much thinner than he had first assumed, it's fur making it look plump. He shook his head, focusing on the thought of how many cats Streampaw's squirrel would feed, and a smile once more was drawn into his face. A little while passed, until finally, the two pushed through the bramble barrier which protected the camp.

Snowdrift tugged on his rabbit as one of its ears got caught on the thorns, tearing away a clump of its fur. He and Streampaw were greeted with a couple of grateful yowls, along with a glare from Mosspaw. Leopardstalk, the medicine cat, hurried forward, his green eyes glittering in relief. "Wonderful hunt, I see." The tom praised, his black fur rippling. "Could I have the squirrel for the sick? They're starving, and —"

The tom was cut off by Pebblestar pushing his way between the him and the two, a smile sprawled along the leader's jaws. "Ah, great job, you two." He purred, his tail swiping across Leopardstalk's muzzle. The black tom recoiled in response, his nose wrinkling. "That's a wonderful looking squirrel." Pebblestar continued. His yellow eyes glowed hungrily, his tongue rasping across his lips.

Snowdrift placed his rabbit on the ground, a frown creasing into his expression. "Yes, it is." He replied coolly.

Pebblestar advanced a step forward. "I'd love to have it for a meal." He rumbled, his breath blowing across Snowdrift's muzzle. Snowdrift's nose crinkled at the stench, but he fought back an angry remark.

Leopardstalk barged forward, clearing his throat. "Pebblestar," he interrupted, his fur rising in irritation. "If you will listen, elders and queens are supposed to eat first. That includes the sick."

Pebblestar glanced at the medicine cat, still wearing a relaxed expression. "Leopardstalk, your patients *will* eat first. You'll be having this rabbit." He shoved Snowdrift's catch towards the black tom, and Snowdrift parted his jaws to say something, but thought better of it, and instead wore a frown.

Pebblestar grinned. "Now, I'll take *this*." He tore the squirrel away from Streampaw's grip. "Thank you, and amazing job with your catch." He meowed, and with a swish of his tail, he padded away just as quickly as he had come.

Leopardstalk muttered to himself, his tail lashing furiously back and forth. Finally, he picked up the rabbit and marched back to his den to feed the prey to the sick, frustration noticeable in his expression.

Snowdrift sighed, closing his eyes for a few moments to calm his boiling rage. He felt somebody's nose lightly touch the tip of his ear, and he turned around to see Streampaw blinking kindly at him. "It's alright." She meowed. "It's just Pebblestar being Pebblestar, everything's going to be fine."

Snowdrift gave a small nod, appreciating the comfort Streampaw was giving him. He looked up at the sky, sighing once more.

*As long as I have Streampaw, everything will be just fine.* He assured himself.

# Chapter Two

[image] [image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Miley's flank rose and* fell at a steady pace, her breathing long and slow as she slept. Suddenly, she bolted upright, her eyes fluttering open. Her gaze swept across the room, her paws sinking down into the cushion of her bed as the tufts of fabric stuck between her toes. "Harvey?" The red tabby meowed, her ears pricked to their fullest extent as she searched for her friend. She pulled herself to her feet, sliding out from the bed and onto the wooden floor. Placing her paws calmly against the solid ground ground, she walked forward, padding straight into another room.

Miley spotted a dusty brown tom dozing peacefully on top of a couch, his lighter colored belly exposed to the sun's light. "Harvey!" She purred, lingering on his name as she arched her back in a luxurious stretch, before leaping onto the soft surface to greet the tom. "Wake up, fluff head!" She poked and prodded at his side, urging him to awaken from his peaceful slumber. A glint of satisfaction appeared in Miley's brown eyes as Harvey stirred, a small groan escaping his muzzle.

"What is it, Miley?" The brown tom groaned, his paws swiping blindly at the air as he remained in his position, his eyes still squeezed shut. At one last prod from Miley, he tossed himself upwards, his amber eyes flashing open. He scrambled to his paws, shoving Miley off the couch in doing so.

Miley's paws scrabbled against the hardwood floor as she caught her balance, quickly pulling herself to stand straight. She flicked her ears as her friend blinked down at her, his head tilted to the side.

"What do you want?" Harvey meowed, his paws dangling over the edge of the sofa.

Miley's gaze darted to and fro, trying to find an excuse as to why she had roused Harvey. Her eyes landed on the perfect item, it's purple fur nearly glowing in the midst of her excitement. Miley pounced forward, her paws hooking the stuffed mouse as she hurled it into the air. She reared onto her hind legs and batted it towards Harvey, taking perfect aim as it flew forward and bounced off his muzzle.

"You're it!" She cried, landing gracefully on all fours. She twisted around, bounding forward to escape Harvey as he scooped the toy mouse up in his jaws, the tom catching onto the game. "You'll never catch me!" Miley teased, tossing back her head as laughter rippled through her bones.

Harvey leaped down from the chair, landing heavily on the ground with a thud. He took a moment to gather himself before thrusting after Miley, the mouse dangling from his jaws.

He cocked back his head, slacking his jaw and sending the purple toy flying. "Yes I will!" He exclaimed, stopping in his pawsteps to watch the toy fly through the air. It missed Miley by a whisker's length, and the she-cat let out a joyous yowl. Miley streaked forward, her red tabby tail streaming behind her. She dove through a flap in a glass door, a sudden whisk of wind rushing through her fur as it flopped shut behind her.

The red tabby slowed her run to a trot, turning quickly around to peer through the glass door. Her paws pricked against the cold snow covered ground as she slowed to a halt, peering through the window to see what Harvey's reaction would be.

The large tom's tail swept angrily back and forth, and his jaws were parted in a frustrated yowl. A small twist of guilt tugged at Miley's heart, but she ignored it. She understood how afraid her friend was if the outside, and he obviously disliked the fact that she used it against him. She pushed away the guilt and waved her tail teasingly at Harvey, a smile parted into her jaws.

Harvey's ears flattened, and he spun around to march away. Miley's head inclined lightly to the side as she watched her friend disappear into the far corners of the den, blinking for just a moment. She

shook out her fur, and turned around, padding across the snow covered yard and to the fence that towered above her. She wriggled her haunches, and thrust herself up, her claws digging ungracefully into the wooden sides. Her hind paws scrabbled against the wood as she hauled herself up, her tail lashing as she fought for balance. The wood shook lightly and a small spray of snow tumbled down onto her nose, until finally, her fighting eased, and she crouched at the top of the fence for a few lasting moments.

Miley breathed in a deep breath, her eyes turning to slits as she relaxed. The crispy, cold air jabbed at her lungs as she inhaled it, little puffs of evaporated liquid billowing from her mouth whenever she exhaled. Some time passed, and a warm, delicious scent reached her nose. Her eyes grew round as she recognized what it was, her mouth watering in excitement to sink her teeth into it.

*A mouse!*

She leaped down from the fence, her paws lightly crunching in the snow. She padded confidently forward, her tail raised into the air behind her. Finally, she spotted the creature, its narrow nose was lowered to its tiny pink paws, nibbling hungrily at a seed. Miley strutted forward, and the mouse sat up, alarmed. It darted across her path, and she lunged towards it, grasping its slim tail between her claws. She yanked it towards her, the tiny creature squirming and squeaking in terror as it fought to escape. It's struggles catching the kittypet by surprise, Miley reared back, her eyes round in shock as the mouse scampered away.

"Why'd it escape?" She cried, her ears swiveling back to pin against her head.

Suddenly, black flickered at the corners of her vision, and her gaze darted towards it, revealing a black and white tom creeping forward, chuckling lightly. Miley instinctively shrank back, a hiss escaping her lips. The tom raised his tail in submission, his head tilted to the side while he still chuckled.

"Why are you laughing?" Miley snapped, her tail lashing.

The tom stiffened for a moment, his jaws squeezing shut. Finally, he

answered, hesitance to his voice. "That was hilarious." He admitted, smirking at Miley as she blinked, dumbfounded.

"What was hilarious?" Miley demanded, standing straight now and blinking at the tom in frustration.

His whiskers quivered in amusement. He was obviously enjoying seeing Miley's frustration. "Your failure." He replied simply, his black and white tail trailing joyously from side to side.

Miley's jaw dropped. "My failure?" She repeated, instantly realizing that the tom was referring to her failed hunt. "That mouse tried to escape! It's not my fault!"

The tom exploded into bursts of laughter, his sides heaving as he did so. "Goodness, you mousebrain!" He laughed. "Of course the mouse tried to run away. If something were trying to kill you, wouldn't you run?"

Miley hesitated, her brow furrowing even further. "Fine." She snapped, her muzzle curling back. "You're right, and I'm wrong. Happy?" She twitched an ear, frustration boiling in her chest.

The tom recoiled, his eyes glittering in a mixture of shock and confusion. "Wow. Who put thorns in your nest?" He huffed, the fur prickling along his spine.

Miley blinked. *How would you fill a twoleg nest with thorns?* She wondered. Her thoughts were diverted to a thorn covered home, and it did not look pleasing. She was snapped out of her thoughts when the black and white tom swatted a paw into the air, growling.

"Hello? Stupid cat? Are you in there?"

Miley shook out her fur, jumping back just in time to avoid his swinging paw. She hissed at him, and he hissed back.

A call rang through the air, and Miley perked up as she recognized the twoleg's voice as one of her housefolk. She glanced back at the tom, her tail twitching. "I'd better go now." She growled, her eyes narrowed as she slunk past the strange cat.

The tom froze, his eyelids lowering until his eyes were slits. "You're a *kittypet?*" He snarled. "That explains it. Go run off to your twolegs, housecat! You'll never catch a mouse, you hear me? *Never!*" Miley spun around to snap at the tom, but before she could, he had lashed out at her. The red tabby yelped, and she swung herself forward before the tom's claws could rip through her fur.

The tom bared his teeth at her, and quickly Miley streaked towards her yard, her tail streaming behind her as she jumped onto the fence. She cast a glance behind her to see that the tom had vanished, his scent lingering in the air. She stood there for a moment, catching her breath and allowing her eyes to scan the landscape for any further signs of the cat even being present, but to no avail. She breathed a sigh, her fur laying flat as she collected herself.

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"What took you so long?"

Miley brushed past Harvey with a short growl, her fur tangled and clumped as she entered through the flap.

"Miley, tell me!" The brown tom pressed, striding alongside Miley as he begged her for answers.

Miley huffed, making her way towards a tin bowl in a few long bounds. "No." she replied, glancing at Harvey once more before bowing her head to lap up some brown pellets, the dry food crunching between her teeth.

Harvey gave a small purr, nudging her side with his nose. "Why not? You know you can tell me anything! Besides, you smell of another cat."

"Are you seeing a tom?" He teased. His whiskers twitched in amusement, but there was also a sad look in his eyes.

Miley snorted, nearly choking on her food as she did so. "Are you kidding me?" She burst out, her tail whipping through the air. "Why would I? I have no romantic interests." She glanced at Harvey with

a small frown. "I'm going to eat now." She finally said, chewing at her food without any further word.

Harvey's tail dropped against the ground, his eyes lowering lightly in frustration to his friend's lack of answers. He flicked the tip of his tail, before turning around and padding away.

Miley shot a look back in his direction, only to see that he had vanished from sight. She shrugged, and resumed eating, the only sound that filled the home was the noise of hard twoleg given food crunching between her teeth.

# Chapter Three

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*A large red leaf* fluttered down from the snow covered trees, landing on a scattered pile of snow. The snow shifted and tumbled in tiny clumps, and a small pink nose found its way out of the freezing substance. "Mist?" A small voice mewed as a tiny, white and brown furred tom-kit scrambled out from a small crevice, his fur clumped and being dragged down by large flakes of snow that clung to his pelt. He shook out his cold fur, sending tiny crystallized snowflakes to the ground.

"Mist? Where are you?" Mouse's patched fur fluffed up to keep himself warm, a shiver raking through his bones as he advanced forward in a short pawstep. He looked around with wide yellow eyes, searching for his mother's familiar light bluish gray dappled fur.

A large fern behind the kit rustled, its leaves swaying as a cat emerged from its shadows. Mouse whipped around, and his eyes lit with recognition. "Mist!" He exclaimed, bounding across the snow to greet his mother. He tripped in the snow and tumbled, landing with his face in it. Mist nosed him to his paws, and gave him a lick across the forehead, a gentle purr rising in her throat.

"Oh, Mouse." The she-cat rumbled, her voice soft and soothing to Mouse's ears as he pulled himself close to her paws. "Are you alright, my kit?"

Mouse nodded, opening his jaws to answer in a verbal response. However, before he could answer, Mist had scooped him up by the scruff, and was padding delicately through the snow and towards an overhang, the ledge balancing overtop of their heads. Mouse squirmed for a few moments, his paws kicking at the air as he tried to scramble out of her grip.

Finally, he gave up, hanging limply in her jaws with a pout on his face. "I'm fine, Mist, I'm fine!" He squeaked, his tail tucking between his legs.

Mist shifted her grip on Mouse's scruff so she could speak, mumbling around his tufts of fur. "You may be fine, however you disobeyed me. You had specific instructions to not leave the den, but you decided to do so anyways." She meowed firmly. Mouse protested no more, shame making his fur grow warm. The lighting grew darker as they entered a dimly lit cavern, the temperatures growing higher however still sending a chill down Mouse's spine.

Mist placed Mouse carefully onto the stone hard ground, giving his fur a few brisk licks. Her tongue scraped down his spine, and he struggled to free himself with yells of complaint.

"Mom!" He yelped, ducking as he dodged a swipe of her tongue. "Stop it — stop!" He writhed away from his mother, a growl of frustration rumbling in his throat. Mist let out a rumbling purr of amusement, a small grin rested on her muzzle. She leaned away from Mouse, who relaxed with a sigh.

Mist flicked her tail over Mouse's ears, her head tipping to the side. "I had caught something for you." She meowed after a few moments of silence. Mouse pricked his ears, excitement tingling in his paws.

"Really? What is it?" He bounced to his paws, his nose twitching eagerly.

Mist's whiskers quivered in amusement as she fondly gazed at Mouse. "Give me one moment. I left it outside so I could fetch you." She rose to her feet and exited the cavern with a flick of her tail, only to come back a few heartbeats later with a somewhat scrawny mouse dangling from her jaws. Mouse's mouth watered hungrily, his yellow eyes fixated on the mouse. His favorite prey, coincidentally, was mouse! He stepped forward, his front paws bouncing with excitement.

Mist approached the kit and placed the mouse before him on the stone ground. She took a small bite out of it to soften the flesh for Mouse, before stepping back. Mouse sniffed its fur, taking a moment

to relish its scent before taking a famished bite out of the rodent's bloody side. He let out a long breath, his muscles relaxing in relief as the delicious flavor rushed over his scent glands. "Thank you!" He breathed out to Mist, his wide yellow eyes blinking up at her. She inclined her head to him, and he dove his muzzle back into its side.

Once Mouse had finished his fill of the mouse, he stepped aside so Mist could have hers. A small spasm of guilt rippled through his fur as he realized that he had left hardly any meat on the prey's bones, and he bowed his head regretfully.

Mist nuzzled Mouse comfortingly, wearing a small smile. "Don't worry." She purred reassuringly, leaning back as she swiped her tongue across her jaw, the hunger she felt clear in her blue eyes. "You need more food than I do. I'll find something for myself later on tonight."

Mist lowered back down to finish the small remains of the mouse, not waiting for her son's response as she gnawed at the remaining meat on the creature's bones. Mouse, still feeling guilty, gazed outside where a small snowfall had begun. Time slipped by, and when he finally returned to his feet, night had risen on the horizon.

"Mouse, come get some rest."

Mist's voice startled Mouse, and he glanced back to see that his mother had already laid down, the spot they had claimed as their nest a shallow scoop in the stone ground. Mouse gave a faint nod, his eyes dilating to the darkness of the cavern. He squared his shoulders and padded over to Mist, curling up in the curve of her belly. His mother's tail wrapped protectively along his side, her breathing growing slow as evidently, she fell asleep. Mouse let the rise and fall of Mist's flank lull him into darkness.

Wind stirred his fur, and he roused in an unrecognizable clearing. A jolt of fear ripped through his chest, and he scrambled to his feet, his heart pounding. Mouse whipped around, his thoughts whirling as he tried to place where he was. Suddenly, he relaxed, his fur laying flat as he realized what was happening. *I'm dreaming.* The thought rang in his ears, and he breathed in deeply, collecting his rapid thoughts and allowing himself to calm down.

Now relaxed, Mouse let himself study the landscape. He was standing in a beautiful starlit clearing. Lush green grass tickled his paws, large trees with countless leaves and branches stretched out around him, their trunks soaring to the sky at endless lengths. Unlike the waking world, the season was set to what presumably was newleaf, a time when plants thrived and grew. Mouse let awe overtake him for a few seconds, his body still aside from the rise and fall of his flank.

"Mouse."

A voice disrupted the peaceful silence, the sound ripping through the air like a cascade of water. Mouse spun around, his fur on end once more as he frantically searched for the source of the noise.

His eyes landed on a black tabby, and he stiffened as the tom approached. Stars glittered in the strange cat's fur, flickering on and off as he grew noticeably closer to Mouse.

"Wh-Who are you?" Mouse demanded, his voice in which was intended on being threatening instead turning out high and afraid.

The tom blinked calmly at Mouse, his orange eyes meeting with Mouse's yellow ones. "There's no need to be startled, kit." The tom meowed in what was meant to be a reassuring tone. Mouse's hackles rose as he stepped away, a growl rising from his chest. The tom ignored Mouse's threatening position, and instead continued. "I'm Darkblaze." He offered, pausing in his pawsteps to seem docile.

Mouse stiffened, and trying to remain calm, he questioned the cat. "What type of name is that?" He asked, the tone of his voice changing from fear to curiosity.

Darkblaze's ears flicked, and his gaze grew distant. "It's a clan name." He murmured in response. He shook his head, instead returning his gaze to the kit. "However, my name is not the reason I have chosen to visit you. You are required to listen to your..." he hesitated, but pressed on. "Your mother, even if you do not trust her motives. If you do not...great danger will fall upon your family, and terror will wreak upon the world as you know." Darkblaze stared deeply into Mouse's eyes, and Mouse self consciously stepped back.

Fear squirmed in his stomach as a blinding flash of white tore across his vision, and before he could react, he woke up.

Mouse rose his head into the air, his eyes flickering back and forth as he calmed himself. *It was just a dream*. He thought, giving his fur a quick shake. *Why should I listen to it, anyways? It was only my imagination*. At that, he lowered his muzzle to his paws, falling back to sleep at the comfort of his own thoughts.

# Chapter Four

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*"Streamflower!"*

*"Streamflower!"*

*"Streamflower!"*

Snowdrift's yowl rose above those of his clanmates as he chanted Streampaw's warrior name, his heart feeling as if it would burst from pride. His eyes enlightened on the figure of the she-cat, her gray fur groomed perfectly. Her head was angled towards the sun, tilted lightly in a comfortable resting position. Her paws were tightly pressed together, her tail wrapped neatly around them while her honey yellow eyes glowed in joy as her new name rang around her in the cheers of her clanmates. However, the only thing that disturbed the overflowing joy that rushed through Snowdrift was the clear scratch on Streamflower's shoulder, and no matter how much Snowdrift tried to ignore it, his attention, once more, was roused to the blood.

The voices of the clan trailed off as Pebblestar signaled with his tail, clearing his throat to continue on with the ceremony. "Mosspaw." He meowed, addressing Streamflower's brother. "You have trained hard and well under the guidance of Quietwish and Snowdrift, and earn the name of a warrior in turn." Pebblestar growled, his voice deep and powerful as he let his gaze sweep through the clearing. Mosspaw stepped forward, his gray and white pelt rippling uncertainly, however he firmly held Pebblestar's gaze. Pebblestar then rested his chin on Mosspaw's head, speaking loud and clear. "By the powers of StarClan, your new name will be Mosspounce. You have shown stealth and efficiency in your training, and have earned this name in honor of your skills."

Mosspaw, now Mosspounce, stretched his muzzle forward to give Pebblestar's shoulder a respectful lick. Instead, Pebblestar backed away before Mosspounce could get relevantly close, and the new warrior stumbled slightly. Pebblestar's claws unsheathed, glinting momentarily in the sunlight before he lashed out, harshly catching them in Mosspounce's shoulder. Blood glittered from a fresh wound as Pebblestar tore his claws away, bringing a clump of fur and flesh with his paw. He flung it to the ground, and dipped his head at Mosspounce. The gray and white tom hadn't even flinched.

*"Mosspounce!"*

*"Mosspounce!"*

*"Mosspounce!"*

Chants roused from the gathered clan as they yowled Mosspounce's name at their leader's permission. Snowdrift was silent for a few moments before joining in, shouting the tom's name in sync with his clanmates. The brief hesitation he had shown was small questioning in the reasons of Mosspounce's name, but he brushed them away almost as quickly as they had entered his mind. *Stealth and efficiency is an interesting choice. He did show efficiency, however not enough stealth as would be moderately pleasing*. Snowdrift shook out his pelt, ignoring the thought as the clan began to disperse.

Snowdrift noticed Mosspounce looking at him with a frown, and he returned the gaze with a raised eyebrow, before searching for Streamflower amongst the horde of cats congratulating the two newly made warriors. Finally, he spotted her gray pelt through the crowd, and made his way towards her. The chants died down and the two locked gazes, time seeming to slow down for a brief moment as he drew close to her.

"Congratulations!" He purred, brushing his muzzle along her cheek.

Streamflower blinked at him with a smile, her expression warm. "Thank you." She responded, her voice thick as she too let out a rumbling purr. Snowdrift felt a stir of butterflies erupt in his stomach as he stared deep into her honey yellow eyes. He couldn't quite place what he was feeling, but it felt like it lasted forever,

swelling in his chest like a blossoming flower. But the feeling was ripped away the moment his gaze flickered over to her blood soaked shoulder, the affectionate smile he wore fading to a frown.

Streamflower's brow creased in concern, and she gently nudged Snowdrift's shoulder. "Snowdrift? What's wrong?" She mewed, her voice soft and comforting to the ear.

Snowdrift glanced down at the ground, swallowing. "I-It's nothing." He lied, his tone hard and uncomfortable. He parted his jaw to change the subject, but instead Pebblestar interrupted, his gray flecked fur rising in irritation.

"Streamflower! Over here, now." The leader snapped, his freckled tail whipping against the freezing ground. Streamflower respectfully dipped her head, and with one last glance at Snowdrift, she obediently bounded off. Snowdrift's heart sank at the memory of the warrior's vigil, his tail trailing against the ground. *I'll speak to her tomorrow*. He assured himself, watching as Streamflower settled down beside Mosspounce, their fur mingling together in a spiral of gray and white as they silently guarded the camp.

"Snowdrift!" A voice called, and the white tom turned around to see Yellowtuft approaching him in a swift stride. "Would you like to go on a border patrol with me and my sisters?"

Snowdrift gave a half-hearted shrug. "Sure." He replied numbly, his gaze returning to Streamflower by the camp entrance. He shook his head, and replaced his dazed frown with a confident smile. He should be happy instead of upset — besides, Streamflower was finally a warrior! He felt a warm burst in his chest as he padding alongside the creamy yellow tom, his tail raised into air. The group of cats filed out of camp, cool air batting at their faces as they emerged into the forest.

"So..." Firesplash began, a teasing tone to her voice as she acknowledged Snowdrift. "Is there something going on between you and Streamflower?" The she-cat's dark ginger fur rippled in amusement as Snowdrift's ears pinned back, his face growing warm.

"I bet there is." Yellowtuft pressed, exchanging a joking glance with

his sister.

The fur rose along Snowdrift's scruff, and he bit his tongue. "N-No!" He blurted, his tail standing on end.

Firesplash let a laugh burst from her muzzle, her paws bouncing into the air. "You so have a thing for her!" She exclaimed.

Willowbush's white tipped tail brushed against Firesplash's muzzle, her head inclined lightly to the side. "Stop teasing the poor tom." She meowed. "Besides, we should be patrolling WindClan's border, *not* gossiping like elders."

Firesplash huffed a laugh, and butted her head against Willowbush's shoulder. Willowbush bristled, and shoved her sister away. Firesplash flung herself back at Willowbush, letting out a yowl as the two began tussling, sending snow soaring into the air as they play-fought.

"Willowbush, Firesplash! Cut it out!" Yellowsplash pushed his way between his two sisters, casting a frown once at both of them. "We need to continue this patrol. Pebblestar will be *furious* if we goof around and can't complete it." His voice was low in a growl, his eyes narrowed sharply in the seriousness of the situation. Firesplash ducked away, her head hanging guiltily. Willowbush on the other hand tilted her head towards the air, regaining herself a serious posture.

The four padded along, growing evidently closer to the WindClan border. The sound of rushing water reached Snowdrift's ears, and he scraped his spine against the bark of a tree, loose fur clinging to it and allowing his scent to linger on the mark. Snowdrift trudged forward, shaking scraps of snow from his feet as he emerged into the open, a river streaming past his paws. He was shoved back a pawstep by a whistling, ice cold gust of wind, his ears forcing back against his head as his eyes squinted against the blasting wind.

Yellowtuft arrived a moment later, taking a moment to breath in the scent of WindClan before acknowledging the patrol with a twitch of his tail. "We're running a bit off schedule," he began, glancing at his sisters for just a moment before continuing.

"Willowbush and I will head to the right, Snowdrift and Firesplash, you'll head to the left. We'll meet back here." The remaining cats murmured their agreement, before splitting their own ways.

Snowdrift and Firesplash headed off, keeping close to the river's bank as they marked the border. Firesplash followed behind Snowdrift, checking to make sure the white tom hadn't forgotten to mark anything. Once they had completed checking the border, the patrol regrouped, before padding back towards camp. Yellowtuft caught himself a scrawny shrew on the way back, and he proceeded in carrying it to deliver the prey to the freshkill pile. The sky was illuminated by a pink glow cast by the setting sun, the fluorescent color bleeding into navy blue. Entering camp, the four cats departed, padding off to do their own thing.

Snowdrift's stomach rumbled, and the tom swiftly approached the freshkill pile, fetching himself a scrawny cardinal and carrying it to the side of the clearing. He finished eating the bird in a few small bites, spitting out the feathers so he could reach the meat. He rose to his paws, ready to pad to the warrior's den. But before he did so, he glanced in Streamflower's direction. He watched as she shifted on her paws, blinking as she stared up at the sunset sky, her fur reflected the sun's light, glowing like it was on fire.

Snowdrift forced his gaze away, and walked drowsily towards the warrior's den, his paws dragging against the snow laden ground. Once he had curled up in his moss nest, his eyelids instantly slid shut, his breathing growing still as he drifted off to sleep.

A yowl rang in Snowdrift's ears, and immediately, he scrabbled to his paws, his heart pounding against his chest. He bolted out of the warrior's den, not caring if he woke any cat as he burst into the moonlit clearing. Moss clung to his white fur as he flipped his head in Streamflower's direction, his gaze locking with her startled eyes. He ran towards her, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

"Snowdrift!" Streamflower purred in surprise, clearly forgetting the rule to remain silent during vigil. "What in StarClan's name are you doing?"

Snowdrift tipped his head to the side, finally catching his breath. "I–

I heard somebody yowl." He meowed, confusion hinted in his words.

Streamflower blinked lightly at the tom, her eyes narrowing ever so slightly. "I heard no yowl." She murmured, concern lighting her gaze. "Are you alright, Snowdrift?" Her voice probed softly at Snowdrift's mind, and he nodded.

"E-Everything's fine." He stammered slightly, swallowing, however his uncertainty was clear. *If it wasn't a yowl... what could it be?* He shook out his pelt, and gave Streamflower a forced smile. "A-Anyways, I'd better get back to sleep — Er, good luck with your vigil." Without waiting for Streamflower to react, he whipped around and ducked back into the den, sinking back down into his nest with a long sigh.

Snowdrift's muzzle buried beneath his paws, and he felt himself fall into a comfortable sleep. However, a troubling thought flickered in the depths of his sleeping mind, and unease prickled at the tips of his paws.

*Where was Mosspounce?*

# Chapter Five

[image]

**Edited ✔**

———————

*Miley stood, waiting in* her yard for any sign of the tom's presence. Her nose kept quivering as she sniffed the air, finding no trace that the black and white tom-cat had passed since the previous day. Her paws tingled with impatience, and her tail gently swished back and forth. *Did he leave?* She wondered, her head tipping to the sun, which rested at its highest peak. She only knew a small amount of information on rogues, some moved, and some did not. Presumably, the tom she had seen moved around instead of settling in a permanent home, which made things all more complicated for Miley's unspecified goals.

"Hello?" She meowed, her voice bouncing back to her as she tentatively stepped forward, her paw skipping back as it shifted from its comfortable position, and into untouched snow. Her fur prickled in irritation, and she brushed away the cold, continuing forward anyways. "Stray tom? Are you there?" She raised her voice steadily higher, listening for any response from the rogue cat. As expected, none came. Miley huffed, shuffling hurriedly to keep herself warm.

Finally giving in to her guttural instincts, she leaped up onto the fence in a few swiftly paced bounds, her fur a reddish brown streak. The fence swayed beneath the sudden unbalance of weight, and she sank her claws into the wood, patiently waiting for it to stop moving. When the time came, she slid down the opposite side, landing firmly on the snow as it crunched beneath her paws. She then stood straight, her brown eyes flickering and observant as her collar let out a small rattle, the leathery band that wrapped around her neck rubbing together at her intentional fall.

"Where are you?" Miley exclaimed, her voice loud enough for a cluster of birds to flock out of a tree. She flattened her ears as she

watched them dissipate into the air, their calls fading into nothing as they vanished from view. She shook out her pelt and trudged forward, the snow squelching between her feet as she sniffed at every nook and cranny. A shiver rippled through her fur, the cold seeping to her skin. She felt her pelt fluff up to warm up, however it didn't do much help.

*Perhaps I should head home*. Unwillingly, the thought crept into her mind, her confidence dropping to her toes. However, just as she turned around to return home, she breathed in to sigh, and a familiar scent caught in her nose. The tabby breathlessly whipped around, her fur spiked in excitement as she recognized it to belong to the tom.

A glitter of excitement appeared in Miley's eyes. Perfect! She thought to herself. *If I find him...I'll learn to hunt.* The thought fueled her with more energy. She darted forward, tracing the scent deeper and deeper into the forest, the trees growing larger and more frequent as she went. Slowly, doubts began swarming in her mind. She shot a look behind her, a lump forming in her throat as she couldn't see the twolegplace through the trees. She swallowed, ignoring her fears with a twitch of her large tail, and she proceeded in propelling herself through the trees, her paws moving in a blur.

Miley stumbled upon an old badger's den. The scent of the creature was faded, but still reeked. The kittypet's nose wrinkled in disgust at the scent, but under it she could smell the rogue. *Had he sheltered here?* She wondered, her nose quivering as she tasted the air. It sure seems like it. *Perhaps he's still in there?* Hesitantly, she paced forward, stepping down into the badger's den. Long, vicious claw marks raked along the exposed earth walls. Shadows huddled in the back of the den, and Miley squinted to see past the darkness. She backed up to leave the den, when one of the shadows rose into the air, a loud snarl coming from the creature.

*Badger!* Miley scrabbled backwards, letting out a terrified screech as the black and white animal padded forward. But then the she-cat froze, blinking as her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting.

"It's you!" She gasped, surprise and embarrassment washing over her fur as she recognized the tom. She gave her chest fur a few

quick licks.

The tom growled in response, his amber eyes flashing in anger. "What's a kittypet like you doing out here?" He spat, his lip curled back to reveal his teeth in a threatening gesture.

Miley puffed out her fur defiantly. "I wanted to find you." She meowed, confidence caking her words, however inside, fear was gripping her heart like icy claws.

The tom's eyes narrowed sharply, and he regarded Miley with a swift glance, looking up at the ceiling of the den, which was tangled with roots. "So you got yourself lost, trying to find me. The twolegplace is skylengths away, and for all you know I could just claw your ears off and leave you here to rot." He scowled, his black ears flipping backwards as he glanced back to Miley.

Miley's jaw parted lightly. She didn't know that all her running had taken her so far. *Will I ever get back?* She shook her head, keeping a firm gaze. "I don't think you'd do that." She meowed firmly, staring into the tom's hard amber eyes.

The tom exhaled deeply, his muzzle wrinkling. "You're right." He confessed, his tail whipping back and forth. "I suppose you'll be staying with me for the night. A kittypet like you would die the minute you step foot out of this den." He snorted. "Although that's preferable, I would rather not have anybody's blood on my paws. Go to sleep. We're leaving in the morning."

Miley clenched her jaw. "What's your name?" She pressed, her ears ever so slightly pricked.

The tom scoffed. "Why should I tell you?" He paused, hardly giving a moment for Miley to respond. "Exactly why I won't tell you my name." There was a hint of aggression in his mew, and he looked at Miley with a glare.

Miley huffed as the tom turned around, wrapping himself up into a ball of fur. "Fine!" She meowed loudly, turning tail to settle down. "I'll make myself right at home."

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After a long time of restlessly trying to get comfortable and complaining about the den, Miley drifted off into an uncomfortable sleep, her tail wrapped across her muzzle. Around a heartbeat later, a warm, saplike scent reached her nose, and her eyes fluttered open. She rose to her paws, her jaw gaping in shock and fear as she looked around. She stood in the middle of a forest clearing. Pine and spruce trees towered around her, and the sky above was swirling with gray clouds.

A scent reached her nose, but this time it carried the presence of a cat. She whipped around, fear crawling along her pelt as she spotted the brown tom creeping towards her, his eyes glowing in an unknown expression. Miley's fur rose, and she arched her back with a hiss. She didn't know how to fight, so she tried her best to look intimidating. The tom had a white splotch on his muzzle, and the closer he got, the less terrifying he appeared to be.

He was actually padding with a straight posture, his head was inclined in Miley's direction, while a friendly smile was curved into his maw. "Greetings, Miley." He meowed gently, sitting down comfortably in a bed of pine needles just a few paces away from the red tabby. Miley frowned lightly, letting her fur run flat as she silently observed the tom. He allowed her, not pressuring her or anything as he awaited for her to speak.

"Who are you?" Miley asked, hesitance to her tone as she watched the stars that dazzled the tom's fur dance around.

The tom's tail flicked in a dismissive gesture, but he answered her question anyways. "My name is Springedjoint." He replied, his tail coiling tightly over his star flecked paws.

Miley tipped her head, ready to press onwards with her questions. The tom, however, interrupted her with a twitch of an ear, continuing with what he had to say. "My name, young Miley, is aside from the point I have come to see you this night." He meowed, startling Miley with the fact that he knew her name. "As far as I can see, you've portrayed an interest towards the outdoors, and you have skills to come that will influence your survival out here in the

wilderness."

"However, the skills you will possess will only be granted if you wish to do this task. It is not simple, nor is it complicated. It will just twist your route of life into something more extraordinary, one of thrill and freedom. You must leave your twoleg home, and follow the brightest star of the night. It will guide you to a position you will forever be grateful for. Denial, although acceptable, will allow you to remain on the path of a kittypet. You will never have the taste of mouse again once you arrive at home with the decision of a no."

The tom — Springedjoint — blinked at Miley as if he were expecting an immediate answer. The kittypet blinked in astonishment, a bit taken back by his words. "This–This is a lot to take in." She meowed softly, her brow furrowed in a mixture of indecision and confusion. "May I take some time to contemplate over my answer? This is...this is all too much for me to respond to so soon. Please?"

Springedjoint went still, making no movement for a few moments that felt like days. "Fine." He replied, giving a stiff nod. "I will give you five days for your answer." He stepped forward and touched his nose to Miley's forehead, his breath stirring her fur. "I hope you make the right choice." He murmured softly as a blinding white light flashed throughout the clearing. Miley squeezed her eyes shut, and when she opened them she was no longer in the clearing, but instead back in the abandoned badger's den with the black and white tom sleeping a few tail lengths away.

Miley staggered to her paws, still weary from her dream as she padded out of the den to get herself some fresh air. As she stepped out, a rush of cold air washed upon her face, and she blinked in shock.

Overnight, it had presumably snowed. A fresh blanket of white had coated the oak forest, and Miley's trail home had vanished. No scent, no footprints, *nothing.*

# Chapter Six

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Mouse leaped into the* snow, his tail wriggling as he vanished beneath the surface. A moment later, her leaped back up, snow scattering around as he exploded from the ground. A clump of the white substance sprayed against Mist's muzzle, the she-cat watching from a few tail lengths away.

"Mouse! Be careful where you throw that." Mist scolded, her blue eyes flashing in mild irritation. Mouse shot a quick glance in his mother's direction, his tiny tail flicking ignorantly as he proceeded in prancing around. The tom-kit was too excited, for it had snowed overnight, and he just *loved* jumping around in it. His heart sank as teeth slid around his scruff, and he let out a mewl of complaint as Mist dragged him out of the snow.

Mist plopped him down onto a stone that jetted out from the ground, its surface wiped free of any snow. "Look at yourself!" Mist exclaimed, cleaning the clumps of solid water from Mouse's pelt with harsh licks from her rasping tongue. "You are such a mess."

Mouse tumbled away from her, sticking his muzzle into the air defiantly. "No I'm not!"

Mist gave her son's fur one last frantic lick before pulling away. "You most certainly are! You were covered from nose to tail tip with that snow. You could get sick!"

Mouse pouted. "No I wouldn't." He retorted sharply, his head tilted towards Mist as a frown wavered into his expression.

Mist narrowed her eyes. "Yes you would. Here, you still need to be cleaned." She leaned forward to cleanse Mouse some more, but before she could reach him, the kit had dove back into the snow,

his fur sinking into the cold ground. For some odd reason, like usual, he felt a tad bit warmer the further down he went, his paws working frantically as he dug himself a hole. Slowly but surely, he began making his way to dirt, the soil scrunching between his toes. He dug further down, a small tunnel beginning to form around him as he tossed pawfuls upon pawfuls of earth behind himself.

Mouse shuffled around the small space he had created, turning around carefully as his pelt slid against the soil. His eyes grew round in shock as he realized that he had actually dug a few mouse-lengths beneath the earth's surface, and with a jolt of sudden fear, he began scrabbling forward, his heart pounding against his chest as he tried to escape the grasp of the loosely packed walls. Something began sucking at his hindpaws, air whisking past his legs as whatever it was tried pulling him back down. The tunnel was collapsing! He frantically lashed his claws against the air, trying to pull himself out as a terrified wail rose in his chest.

"Mist!" He cried as the invisible force succeeded, earth crumbling around him as he slid downwards, his tail coiling into an incredibly uncomfortable position as dirt clamped into his fur. "Help!"

A loud thumping came from above Mouse's head, his dirt covered ears making the noise nearly inaudible. There was a loud scraping and dirt tumbled around Mouse, covering him as oxygen became thinner. There was a flicker of light, and Mouse felt something grab him by his scruff.

Mist pulled the kit swiftly out of the hole she had dug to free him, Mouse swinging limply in her jaws. She placed him onto the snowy ground, rolling him onto his paws. "Mouse?" The she-cat meowed desperately, her voice hitched in concern. "Mouse, are you alright?"

Mouse was trembling, and after a few moments of silence he responded with a shaky nod, a whimper breaking through his jaws as he pressed against Mist's leg. Mist's muscles relaxed as she allowed Mouse to lean against her, a sigh billowing from her mouth as she looked up at the sky.

"M-Mist?"

Mouse's trembling mew broke the silence, and Mist glanced down at him, blinking softly as the tom's yellow eyes stared up at her.

"Was I going to die?" Mouse whispered.

Mist's heart cracked in sympathy, and she wrapped her tail firmly around her kit. "No, no..." she whispered to him, gently licking his forehead in a comforting gesture. "Of course not. You were nowhere near dying, little one."

Mouse shuffled his paws. "A-Are you sure?" He stammered, his pelt bushed up.

Mist nodded. "I'm sure." She replied soothingly, tightening the grip of her tail.

A long sigh escaped Mouse's jaw, his eyes slipping shut as he huddled against his mother's form. "Thank you, Mist." He whispered, his voice barely audible as he breathed out the words.

Mist nodded numbly, staring down at her kit as he fell asleep. "Lets head back home." She murmured, knowing he wouldn't hear her as she carefully lifted him from the ground. "You've had enough time to play today."

# Chapter Seven

[image]

**Edited ✔**

———————

*Pebblestar narrowed his eyes*, observing the clan with a cold, hard look. He spotted the two medicine cats, Leopardstalk and Twigpool running about, tending to the ill Quietwish, Paleclaw, and Thrushpounce.

*Weaklings.* He scoffed, his eyes growing more narrowed. His tail swished across the surface of the high ledge, small flakes of snow gathering on is fur at the action. *Easily disposable if any act of mutiny rises amongst them.* He turned his head away, searching the clearing for anything of more interest. He spotted two kits, Splinterkit and Beetlekit, tussling in the snow. The two grew steadily closer to the sick, their squeals exploding into the air. The medicine cats seemed not to notice the dangerously close distance, and Pebblestar watched in interest. The kits' father, Redspark strode forward, speaking to the two young cats in a brisk tone. Shamefully, the two scampered off to another spot in the clearing, and began tussling once more.

*Smart tom*. Pebblestar silently acknowledged, his tail flicking as he peered closer to the red and black tabby. *Loyal, too*. He shifted back to an eased position, and let his eyes survey the clearing once more. His eyes landed on a familiar white tom, and he scoffed, frustration boiling in his chest. The leader deeply regretting his previous trust in Snowdrift. He obviously had conspiracy running through his mind, and it sent Pebblestar seething with rage to see one of his warriors with such disloyalty.

*Thank StarClan his ways didn't transfer over to Mosspounce. Streamflower already has been effected enough — let's hope that she remains loyal, even under such a revolting cat's influence.*

"P-P-Pebblestar?" A meow broke through the leader's thoughts, and

instinctively the gray flecked tom spun around to face the cat with his claws unsheathed, a growl rising in his throat as he posed to lash out at whomever it may be.

Littleshine cowered away by a flinch, and Pebblestar relaxed. "Oh. It's you." He rumbled in acknowledgement to his deputy. His tail flicked lightly, and he tilted his head to the side. "What do you want?" The hostility he felt wasn't anywhere close to being covered in his tone as he awaited a response, impatience curling his claws into the ground.

"I-I wanted to ask you, P-Pebblestar," the golden she-cat stammered, her paws shuffling against the ground. "C-Could I take the d-day off of my duties? I-I'm not feeling my best, and I..." she trailed off, shamefully meeting her leader's sharp gaze.

"You want to take a day off?" Pebblestar hissed, a murderous glint to his eyes.

Littleshine swallowed, fear evident in her eyes as she gave an awkward nod. "Y-Yes, Pebblestar."

*You better be scared.*

"You horrible excuse for a deputy!" Pebblestar shrieked, lashing his claw against the she-cat's cheek. Littleshine let out a cry as she scrambled back. A few eyes darted up to the highledge, but they quickly averted into different directions. "How dare you ask for a day off? If you ask any more questions like this," Pebblestar towered over her, his breathing heavy and furious as he glared down at the deputy. "You'll be sorry."

Littleshine whimpered, and pawed at her fresh wound. Blood oozed down her cheek as she backed away, giving a small and pained nod.

"Go see Leopardstalk and get that cleaned up." Pebblestar ordered, flicking his gray tail over Littleshine's head. The golden she-cat nodded once more, and scrambled away, before extending her paws into a sprint as she raced to the medicine den. Pebblestar snorted in disappointment, turning his head away to scan the clearing. Still bubbling with rage, he padded down from the high ledge, and

looked around briefly.

"Snowdrift." He meowed coldly, meeting the white tom with a flat expression.

The cat perked up, his blue eyes flickering in uncertainty as he met with the leader's gaze. "Uh...yes, Pebblestar?"

Pebblestar twitched his tail tip, fighting back the urge to rip out the tom's throat right then and there. "Would you like to go hunting with me?" He purred, the taste of blood already evident on his tongue.

Snowdrift flinched back, momentarily at a loss of words. "Well — I, uh, am due to go on a border patrol soon." He meowed, the fur along his shoulders fluffing up.

"Well, I'm the leader, and I'd like to go hunting with you. You are excused from that border patrol." Pebblestar rushed, forcing back a growl as he remained in a semi-calm posture.

"O-Oh." Snowdrift stammered in reply, his blue eyes darting nervously around the clearing until finally settling on a gray figure. He met his gaze back with Pebblestar's, newfound eagerness glittering in his icy eyes. "May Streamflower accompany us?"

Pebblestar parted his jaws to object, when Snowdrift pressed on. "I-I mean...it would make sense! I'm sure you could help reinforce her skills, since she did *just* become a warrior."

Pebblestar's shoulders sagged lightly. *I'd better not make myself seem suspicious. I'll gain his trust, first.* He decided.

"Fine. Streampaw — I mean, flower, may come with us."

Snowdrift perked up. "Thank you, Pebblestar." He meowed in relief. He beckoned Streamflower over, and the she-cat bounded towards the two toms, her paws gliding across the ground.

"Hello!" She chirped, her tail waving in a greeting.

Snowdrift smiled. "Streamflower, Pebblestar and I will be going

hunting. Do you want to join us?"

Streamflower bounced to her paws. "Of course!" She purred.

Pebblestar curled his lip as the two young warriors began chattering like birds, and swiftly, he led the way out of camp.

*Stay calm. You'll get to it soon enough...and Snowdrift will forever regret disobeying me.* Pebblestar assured himself, his muzzle curling in a grin.

# Chapter Eight

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*"I'm sorry, but it's* not my fault you decided to blindly wander into these woods." The tom hissed, his amber eyes flashing in anger as he slunk past Miley, his nose twitching as he sniffed at the crispy cold air.

Miley's scruff bristled. "Actually, it is. And also, I didn't *blindly* wander into the woods. I followed you, fluffbrain." She retorted sharply, whipping her tail through the air.

The black tom snorted, his lip peeled back viciously. "If you wanted to come with me so badly, why didn't you prepare yourself and remove that collar of yours?" He asked venomously, angling his muzzle scornfully towards Miley's neck, where a leathery brown collar was fastened tightly around it.

Miley recoiled, a flash of hurt appearing in her eyes, before quickly vanishing with the twitch of an ear. "I'm sorry, but would you even be able to do so?" She didn't wait for a response, and pressed onwards. "That, for a fact, would be a no. It's nearly impossible to remove a collar from yourself, unless you have the help of another cat."

The tom snarled. "Fine." He began walking away, but at the last moment he whipped around and leaped at Miley, his jaw outstretched in a yowl of outrage.

Miley scrabbled backwards with a cry of shock as his teeth sank into the fur around her neck

*"What are you doing?*" She screamed, her heart pounding in terror as the tom dug his fangs into her neck. She tried shoving him away, but to no avail. He released his grip, but lashed out at her with

unsheathed claws. Miley cowered away as his claws connected with her neck, and her life flashed before her eyes. For a moment, she felt light as a feather, before pulled back into reality as a heavy weight dropped from her neck. Surprise flashed across her gaze as she looked down. She had gained no injury, but as she looked at the ground a wail rose in her throat.

"My collar!" She cried, terror igniting like a flame in her brown eyes. "What did you do?" She raised her terrified eyes to meet with his expression. His tail whipped back and forth, and his sides heaved. His claws sank into the snow as pants escaped his muzzle.

"You said it's impossible to remove a collar on your own." He hissed, his amber eyes darting to lock with Miley's. "So I just did you a favor."

Miley's heart sank like a rock.

"Shade." The tom meowed out of nowhere, his voice raspy as he calmed his panting.

Miley perked up, curiosity glittering in her still terrified eyes. "Shade?" She echoed. "You're shady?" She let out a wry laugh as her jaws parted to make another comment, but before she could, the tom furiously interrupted her.

He pinned back his ears as he flashed Miley a glare. "No!" He snapped. "It's my name, mousebrain."

Miley was briefly startled. "I —" she began, before Shade interrupted her again with a flick of his tail.

"Don't." He growled, his vicious tone drawing her to silence. "We need to hunt before you barrel me with questions. Got it?" He looked at her sharply, and she replied with a stiff nod. "Now. I'm going to help you and your pathetic pelt survive out here." He proceeded. Miley jumped in alarm.

"But I have to go back to my den!" She blurted, her tail tip twitching as worry stabbed at her heart.

Shade quirked a brow. "I thought you wanted to stay out here." He

growled, his nostrils flaring as his sharp eyes met with hers.

Miley's mouth dried, and she shifted uncomfortably under his scornful gaze. "Y-Yeah, of course I want to leave." She meowed, the lie weighing down on her chest. "I-I just have to say goodbye to a friend!"

Shade snorted, rolling his eyes in annoyance. "Fine." He hissed. "I'll escort you back to your twoleg nest, then I'm leaving. With, or without you."

Relief welled up inside of Miley's chest, and she let out a short, but grateful purr. "Great!" She chirped, feeling excitement once more flood over her. "Now, can you teach me how to hunt?"

Shade stiffened, and rested his gaze on her. "You don't know how to hunt?" He spat. "What kind of a mousebrain are you?"

Miley stuck her muzzle into the air. "Well you should know I can't hunt! You saw the perfect demonstration of my failures yesterday." She tilted her head to the side, recalling his teasing from the previous day.

Shade grumbled in annoyance, his ears twitching as he squared his shoulders. "Fine." He sighed in reluctance. "I'll teach you."

Miley perked up. "Great!" She exclaimed, bouncing over to Shade's side. Her steps felt light and weightless, but a prick of discomfort ached at her chest as she noted the absence of her collar. *Hopefully my housefolk will find me a new one.* She thought to herself, dismissing her worries with an eager flick of her tail.

Shade touched his tail to Miley's shoulder in an instructive manner, buying her attention. "Now, lower yourself down like this, and make sure your paws are tucked in neatly..." he began, empathizing on every word as he pointed out the flaws in her position. Miley did as she was told, and time slipped by as the two practiced their hunting moves in the snow covered clearing, Miley's prickling pelt lowering to a state of ease.

# Chapter Nine

[image]

**Edited ✔**

———————

*Mouse's eyes flicked around* in a mixture of alarm and confusion, narrowing his brow as he tried to concentrate on the shadowy figures shifting along the horizon. A cat was streaking forward, it's identity a mystery to the kit for it was concealed in fog. It's jaws were stretched wide in a silent plea, and Mouse followed its desperate gaze towards a smaller, more lithe figure. The smaller cat snapped at the one pleading, before whipping around and racing away into the distance, where yet another cat patiently waited in the murky darkness. It beckoned the smaller one with a swipe of its tail, and in sync, the two disappeared into nothingness, leaving the first cat sobbing on the floor.

Shadows collected around its paws, wrapping around the darkness that had already concealed the scenery, before the substance began flushing towards Mouse, who reared back and began running in fear for his life. It however, caught up to him with not a moment to spare. He quickly identified it as incredibly thick fog as it wrapped around him, and his eyes grew round in terror as he tried to scream, the substance pouring down into his mouth and suffocating him. *Help!* He silently pleaded, writhing around as he fought for breath. *I'm going to die!*

His paws were unsheathed as he fitfully clawed at the air, his strength slowly ebbing away. Suddenly, he felt his eyes close, only to burst open a moment later at the calls of his mother. He gulped in mouthfuls of air, his pounding heart calming, but still skipping in fear. "Mouse!" The blue-gray she-cat exclaimed, rasping her tongue over the kit's straggly fur. He made no protest, shivering continuously under her soothing strokes.

"What happened?" Mist mewed between licks, her blue eyes glittering with concern. Mouse pressed himself close to her, small

whimpers breaking through his chest.

Mouse turned his head to look at his mother with wide, yellow eyes. "I-I had a nightmare." He rasped, his tail tucked tightly between his vibrating legs.

Mist gave a stiff nod, wrapping herself protectively around the kit until his shivering subsided, his flanks evening to a gentle rise and fall. "I could tell." She murmured, allowing her kit to bury his nose into her fur. "You were tossing and turning in your sleep. Care to tell me what it was about?"

Mouse froze, his mind set astray as he wondered whether or not to tell her. After a moment of pondering, he shook his head. Mist nodded in understanding.

"I understand." She soothed, rasping her tongue once more over his soft fur. "How about this," she glanced towards the entrance of their den, where stars glittered and sent an eerie light to illuminate the darkness. "I'll go hunting, and you can stay behind and guard the den." She tilted her head, silently urging him to agree.

Mouse was still for a few moments, before giving an eager nod. *It would be nice to clear my mind.* He thought to himself, his whiskers quivering as his mother got up and padded away. His eyes trailed after her, before she vanished into the night. He rose to his paws, now wide awake that his fears had been brushed away. His nose twitching, he padded along, an odd scent tickling at his nostrils. He spotted an odd material crested onto the ground, it was clumped and green, and he recognized it as moss. He prodded it with a paw, and excitement ignited amongst his yellow eyes.

"I could gather some of this for Mist!" Mouse murmured to himself, his white and brown tail flicking eagerly. He grasped it between his teeth and dragged it to their sleeping spot, dropping the moss into the hollow scoop. He tasted the air, and he caught the scent of even more. Self-consciously, he began following the smell, his nose quivering as he was led out of the den and into the cool outside. His paws slipped indents into the snow, his pads pricking from the cold as he continued silently onwards, allowing his paws to lead him further and further from the den, desperation to find more moss

driving him forward.

"Mouse?"

Mouse whirled around in surprise, blinking up at Mist who had appeared behind him. "Mist!" He exclaimed, freezing in his pawsteps. Mist's pelt was prickling as she rushed forward, covering him in short licks.

"Mouse! What are you doing?" She hissed, concern and anger filling her mew. Shamefully, Mouse ducked his head away.

"I-I..." he trailed off, and gazed up at her. "I found moss." He whispered. "And I-I wanted to find the source."

Mist shook her head, a long sigh billowing from her mouth. She tilted back her head and calmed herself, gazing at the night sky for a few lingering moments. Finally, she returned her gaze to her kit. "Mouse, how many times do I have to tell you not to leave the den while I'm away?"

Mouse shifted under his mother's unwavering gaze, his pelt prickling in undeniable shame. No excuse to his disobedience came to mind, so he remained in silence.

Mist's tail tip twitched, and she opened her jaws to say something. Before she could, she snapped it shut and bolted upright, her ears perking up as alarm struck her gaze. Her nose twitched as she tasted the air, and slowly her fur began to rise. She started out of her position and shoved Mouse forward, causing the kit to stumble and yelp.

"Mist!" He exclaimed as she shoved him along. The kit scrabbled to gain his footing, but to no avail as his mother proceeded in driving him along.

"Hurry!" She hissed, before shaking out her fur in annoyance and scooping him up into her jaws. He let out a squeak of surprise as she charged through the trees, moonlight that dappled the floor flashing past them as Mist raced towards their den.

The she-cat skidded into the den, dropping Mouse to the ground.

Mouse scrabbled to his paws, his fur twitching in shock. Mist bunched her shoulders, her flanks heaving as she caught her breath. Moments of awkward silence went by, until she finally raised her muzzle into the air, and tilted her head towards Mouse.

"Are you alright?" She murmured. Unease prickled at Mouse's fur as he gave a stiff nod, a ragged sigh rushing from his muzzle.

"Y-Yeah. Just a bit shocked, I guess." He replied, shuffling his paws as he tried to avoid his mother's piercing gaze.

Mist sighed, dropping her gaze. "Alright. Don't wander away again, alright? Otherwise, you'll be in serious trouble."

Mouse gave a brisk nod.

"Now, I'm going to get some rest, and it would be best if you did as well."

Mouse frowned lightly, inclining his head to the side. "Can't I play a little bit? I'm nowhere close to tired." He mewed, his yellow eyes emanating a soft glow.

Mist sighed, and gave a small nod. "Alright." She flicked her tail tip. "Just don't stay up too late."

Mouse bounced to his paws. "Thank you, Mist!"

Mist gave a full nod, wrapping herself into a small ball in the nest. Her eyes fell shut, and a few moments passed until her breathing went steady, her flank rising and falling in a gentle rhythm. Mouse waited a heartbeat or so longer, before turning around and creeping forward, slipping out into the wilderness outside of the cave.

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Mist's heart pattered against her chest, a familiar feeling of nausea rising in her stomach as she watched the brown and white she-cat huddled with her kits. The kits, a tom and a she-cat, parted their jaws in wails of fear and terror, although no sound erupted from their opened mouths. Instinctively, Mist launched herself forward as the brown she-cat met her gaze. The ground trembled beneath the

mother and her kits, before it fell away into nothingness. A screech erupted from Mist's throat, and she grabbed onto whatever she could, skidding on the edge as something soft clutched into her jaws. She scrabbled to a frantic stop, a kit dangling from her jaws.

She placed the crying kit down, her sides heaving as she approached the ledge to peer down. Nothingness gaped before her, unable to see the bottom of the deep pit. Mist started as something pressed against her flank, and she blinked down as the kit silently pleaded for its mother's warmth. Fresh with grief, Mist bowed over the kitten, allowing it to huddle against her flank. She glanced up at the sky, her eyes misty with tears and loss.

"I'll help you." Mist vowed, closing her eyes as dust swirled around her. "I promise I'll keep him safe."

# Chapter Ten

[image]

**Edited ✔**

———————

*Snowdrift had been arranged* for a dawn hunting patrol by the abandoned twoleg nest with Oaktail, Lilystripe, and Tortoisefoot with his apprentice Slopepaw accompanying him. The young blue-gray tom had maintained a good behavior, leaving Tortoisefoot with a smug satisfaction. Suddenly, Snowdrift spotted a mouse scurrying amongst leaf ridden snow out of the corner of his eye, and he leaned towards Slopepaw, averting the apprentice's attention.

"Slopepaw," Snowdrift whispered, flicking his white tail across Slopepaw's ears as he began to drift away from the warrior. Slopepaw darted back alongside Snowdrift, his lip curled in a mild sign of frustration. "Look, try and catch that mouse." Snowdrift ordered, his blue eyes remaining calm. Slopepaw followed Snowdrift's gaze, discovering the mouse for himself. His eyes brightened, and he gave an eager nod. The apprentice licked his lips, and lowered into a crouch, stalking forward with the skill of a warrior.

Snowdrift watched as Slopepaw carefully let his tail rise from the ground, placing his paws delicately against the snow which let nearly inaudible crunches pervade through the crisp air. The patrol had stopped to watch the apprentice's hunt as he slipped through the undergrowth, an eagerness shown in his rapidly twitching ears.

Tortoisefoot padded up to stand beside Snowdrift, wearing a scowl. "You're not his mentor." He hissed into Snowdrift's ears, scorn filling his mew. "*I* am!"

Snowdrift dismissed the dark brown tom with a flick of an ear, intent on watching Slopepaw in his hunt. Tortoisefoot huffed and gave up, stalking away from Snowdrift with frustration evident in his prickling fur. Slopepaw neared pouncing distance, and he fell

still, wriggling his haunches as he prepared to dispatch the mouse as a small breeze ruffled his fur. Before he could do so, however, the mouse perked up, it's beady eyes darting towards the apprentice. Before the tom could react, it had scampered away into the undergrowth, its skinny tail vanishing into the cluster of bushes.

Slopepaw let an outraged yowl escape his lips, and forgetting entirely about the rest of the patrol, he pounded after the rodent, crashing into the undergrowth and sending the remaining leaves fluttering to the snow covered earth. Tortoisefoot snarled furiously, and without a moment to lose he charged after his apprentice. Exchanging a glance with Lilystripe and Oaktail, Snowdrift raced after the two, his tail rushing out behind him.

Following the mingled scent trail of Tortoisefoot and Slopepaw, finding where they were was an easy task. The apprentice and his mentor had finally halted, and pulling to a stop with the rest of the patrol on his heels, Snowdrift pricked his ears, his sides heaving as he rasped in large gulps of air, his breath billowing from his mouth in small puffs of white air.

"What in the name of StarClan was that?" Tortoisefoot snapped, his eyes narrowed to amber slits.

Slopepaw ignorantly swiped a paw across his muzzle, his eyes glinting in irritation. "I'm sorry." He muttered, swiping his tail against the snow laden ground as he averted Tortoisefoot's scorching gaze. Tortoisefoot scowled, and cuffed the apprentice over the ear. Slopepaw's ears flattened as he was forced to direct his gaze to lock with his mentor's. Tortoisefoot leveled himself to keep his eyes firmly locked on Slopepaw's, and the apprentice fidgeted under the cold flames.

"Next time, you have to be downwind of the prey." Tortoisefoot hissed, a small spray of spit splattering across Slopepaw's face. Slopepaw flinched a little, and the fury ignited in Tortoisefoot's eyes only increased. "Get back to camp. You'll need to speak to Pebblestar about your failure."

Slopepaw's eyes rounded in terror. "Tortoisefoot, no!" He exclaimed, his fur bursting onto its end. "Please, I'll — "

Tortoisefoot whipped his tail across Slopepaw's muzzle, and he recoiled with a muffled yelp. "No objections. I'm your mentor, and you have to listen to me."

Snowdrift furrowed his brow. "Now hold on," he began, barging his way between Tortoisefoot and Slopepaw, squaring his shoulders as a glare found its way through his blue eyes. "Give Slopepaw a chance! His hunter's crouch was excellent, better than yours, Tortoisefoot, and he's only an apprentice. Everybody makes silly mistakes just as he did, and he deserves no punishment for being unable to catch that mouse." Snowdrift's eyes flashed with a challenge. "And we haven't even fully started the patrol yet."

Tortoisefoot's lip peeled back. The two toms stood there, staring each other down for moments that lasted for what felt like forever. Slopepaw watched with fear as the silence dragged on, until finally, Tortoisefoot's growl broke through the still air.

"Fine."

Snowdrift let out a small trill of triumph, his tail curling into an arch over his back. Lilystripe whispered something inaudible to Oaktail, and the tabby gave a nod with a small frown at Snowdrift. Slopepaw padded towards the white warrior, and rearranged himself back into the patrol as they prepared to set off back in the direction of the abandoned twoleg nest.

"Thank you." Slopepaw murmured, his eyes momentarily meeting with Snowdrift's before darting away. Snowdrift inclined his head in a nod, and the five cats set off, Snowdrift taking up the rear.

Oaktail fell back, falling into step alongside Snowdrift. "You're acting like leader all of a sudden." He droned, his eyes searching along Snowdrift's gaze with a dark glint in their yellow depths.

Snowdrift felt a surge of defense, and he parted his mouth to make a retort, but Oaktail beat him to it. "We have one leader in this clan, and intentions to become leader following Pebblestar's reign is treason, so long as you're not deputy." Poison slithered from Oaktail's mew, and an involuntary shiver pierced through Snowdrift's spine.

"I was only stating my opinion," Snowdrift declared boldly. "I have no wishes to become future leader, just the best warrior I can be." His heart skipped a few beats at Oaktail's mention of treason, for the punishments were severe. *I swear to StarClan, if he says I've been disobedient to Pebblestar — I'll claw his ears off!*

Not buying it, Oaktail's lip peeled back, but he gave a nod nonetheless. "Just don't do anything mouse-brained." He threatened, his tail raised. Snowdrift swallowed his pride and with a wry smile he nodded. Satisfied, Oaktail turned back to the patrol, bounding back into place behind Lilystripe. Snowdrift stilled for a moment, watching as the patrol edged further away. Shaking his white fur to free it from any scraps of snow, he pounded after them, falling into step amongst his fellow warriors.

The patrol arrived at the twoleg nest in a short period of time, the five cats splitting off to hunt on their own, while Tortoisefoot went with Slopepaw to assess him on his hunting skills. The dark colored warrior was still sore over Snowdrift's comment, and as they parted he flashed the white cat an envious glare.

By the time the patrol had completed their hunt, the sun was close to its highest peak. Snowdrift had unfortunately caught nothing, and to make up for it he had collected a few leaves with small white flowers that smelt like herbs for Leopardstalk and Twigpool. They had been nestled in the roots of a young birch tree, and it was a miracle they had made it so far into the leafbare. Slopepaw had found himself a scrawny cardinal, although pride still glittered in his blue eyes, regardless of the freshkill's size, while Oaktail found himself an elderly mouse. Alongside Snowdrift, Tortoisefoot and Lilystripe had caught nothing, although they hadn't arisen with the idea of gathering herbs for a replacement.

As an excuse to his lack of prey, Tortoisefoot took the lead and meowed to the rest of the patrol. "I was busy teaching Slopepaw a better hunting technique!" He declared, shooting everybody else a confident sneer. "And all that mangy apprentice caught was a scrappy bird."

Slopepaw shamefully dipped his head, the red bird dangling loosely from his jaws. Snowdrift's fur bristled defiantly, but he didn't speak

as to not cause any unnecessary arguments. Instead, he padded to Slopepaw's side and rested his tail on the apprentice's shoulder in a comforting gesture. Slopepaw started and looked over to the white tom, who smiled around the cluster of leaves clamped between his teeth. Glancing away, the blue-gray tom bounded forward to find his place beside Tortoisefoot, shooting one last glance back at Snowdrift before keeping distant from him for the rest of the patrol.

Not long after, the cats emerged into ThunderClan's camp, brushing past the bramble barrier. Slopepaw and Oaktail went to deposit their prey into the freshkill pile before heading their own separate ways and mingling with the remainder of the clan, Tortoisefoot tracked down Pebblestar and reported Slopepaw's progress, his eyes occasionally having a spark of anger ignite in them, and Snowdrift hurried to the medicine den to offer Leopardstalk and Twigpool the possible herbs he had found.

Slipping into the small cavern, Snowdrift sensed a mild temperature drop, his fur fluffing up a little to remain warm. Although the wind chill had gone down, he still needed the extra warmth, not wanting to risk catching a cold, or even freezing to death. Snowdrift made sure to swerve past the sick cats, scents of greencough stinking up the air. A shuffle of came from around a small corner, and Snowdrift peered towards it, his ears pricked and eyes gleaming in the darkness.

"Leopardstalk? Twigpool?" He meowed tentatively as he placed the mouthful of herbs onto the dusty floor, a paw lifted in preparation to leave as he craned his head to see around the corner.

A small murmur answered him, and his eyes adjusted to see two pelts, silver and black, brushing against eachother as the two medicine cats arranged and collected herbs from a crevice in the back of the cavern. The two cats exchanged a few words, and Twigpool ducked away to greet Snowdrift.

"Hello, Snowdrift." The silver tabby acknowledged with a dip of his head, his silvery blue eyes glittering curiously, although hollowed with a vague sign of stress. "What brings you to our den today? Haven't caught a cold, it seems. A thorn in your paw?" Twigpool's whiskers quivered as he let his eyes sweep along Snowdrift's pelt,

and he stepped forward to inspect the tom, a jerky shift to his movements, as if he were to break into helpless sobs at any moment. The tom, however, kept his cool, and with a twitching nose he pried through Snowdrift's fur, not giving the warrior time to respond.

Snowdrift took a pawstep back, a flash of surprise igniting in his eyes. "No, I'm not injured, nor sick." He replied, flicking an ear tip. "I brought some herbs for you and Leopardstalk. It's leafbare, and I know how precious any medicine you can get your paws on can be."

Now it was Twigpool's turn to be surprised. His blue eyes grew as round as twin moons, and a small, joyous purr rose in his throat as he shuffled away from the warrior. "My apologies, Snowdrift." He murmured, ducking his head sincerely. "Lately, Leopardstalk and I have hardly been given the time to leave the den and find the herbs we need. So...thank you." Twigpool dipped his head, relief warming his voice as he spoke. Tilting his head, he glanced at the herbs at Snowdrift's paws.

"Feverfew." The medicine cat commented, a flash of surprise shown in his eyes. "Where did you find this? It could help soothe our patient's headaches."

"Near the abandoned twoleg nest and between the roots of a young birch."

Twigpool's whiskers quivered. "Great, thank you, Snowdrift." He bowed down and grasped the bundle of herbs between his teeth. Glancing towards Snowdrift once more, he mewed in a muffled tone around the mouthful of herbs. "You should go find something to eat. Being around these sick cats isn't good for you — it would be terrible to have a warrior infected with the illness."

Snowdrift inclined his head respectfully, and exited the den in arrival back into the camp's clearing. A cool wind stroked against his fur, and he fluffed it up to warm himself as he approached the freshkill pile. He chose a large, but scrawny raven, and selected a spot by the towering walls of the camp to eat, settling down in the shade where a small breeze whisked past him. Nearly the moment he had settled down and taken a bite out of the freshkill,

Streamflower came bounding in his direction, yellow eyes gleaming like orbs of honey.

"Snowdrift!" She purred, plopping down next to him with her pelt brushing against his.

Snowdrift perked up, a pure erupting into his throat at the sight of the newly made warrior. "Hello, Streamflower." He greeted, his white tail brushing lazily against the ground. "Care to share?"

Streamflower tilted her head for a moment, but gave a shake of her head. "No thanks, Snowdrift. You seem hungry. Besides, I already ate before I went on the dawn border patrol!" She let out an ecstatic *mrrow*.

Snowdrift shrugged. "Suit yourself." He replied.

Streamflower chuckled as he gulped down the remainders of the raven, waiting patiently by his side. Once he finished, she addressed him before he could get up and leave. "So...Snowdrift. I wanted to ask you something." Her eyes strayed to the ground, and the new warrior dared not to meet his gaze.

"Would...Would you like to be my mate?" She lifted her head, her eyes sparkling with hope and fear. Snowdrift's mouth went dry, and he felt himself go still. Streamflower anxiously waited his response, and when it finally came, she shied away in fear of rejection.

But it was just the opposite as Snowdrift gave a rickety nod, trembling from nose to tail tip with joy.

"Of course I'll be your mate, Streamflower."

# Chapter Eleven

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Miley rapidly ran a* hindpaw at her neck, her claws partially unsheathed as she tried to itch away the discomfort of no collar. It had been a couple of days since Shade had torn it off, and the lack of it had left a dull ache around her head, and she completely despised it.

Shade and Miley had been traveling for a few days since then, taking constant twists and turns through the forest as they tried to find their path back to the twolegplace. Shade was now quite certain he was set on the right path, and the two had stopped for a hunting break.

"So, Miley, let's see if you can catch anything." Shade meowed. As instructed, Miley lowered herself downwards, her tail brushing lightly back and forth and unsettling the surface of the snow.

"Miley! Keep your tail still." Shade's voice startled the kittypet, and she lifted her head to shoot a glare at the black and white tom. Shade remained with a steady and hostile gaze, meeting her defiant eyes with a blood-chilling scowl. With a huff, Miley returned to her hunting crouch, this time making sure to keep her tail off the ground.

"Good." said Shade, creeping around her as he observed her position. "Just tuck your forepaws a whiskers length closer together, then it'll be perfect."

Miley, once more, did as she was told, irritation prickling at her skin. Her pelt twitched impatiently, until finally, Shade gave an approving nod. Miley straightened herself, her muscles relaxing in great relief, but her stretch was cut short by claws swiped at her head. The kittypet ducked in perfect timing before Shade's claws

could score across her face, and a jolt of fear coursed through her veins. With a pounding heart, she straightened to meet the toms gaze.

"You piece of dung!" She cursed, a scowl furrowing its way into her now scrunched up expression.

Shade whipped his tail angrily, his claws scoring into the cold earth as pants heaved through his flanks. His amber eyes flashed and he looked at Miley, his lip peeled back. "We're going hunting. There is no time to relax in leafbare." He hissed, his flanks easing to a steady, although stiff pace.

Miley's panicked arch of her spine slowly diminished, although she still warily eyed the rogue tom, clearly afraid of another violent outburst. Cautiously, she addressed the tom, her brown eyes flickering across him in search for any sign of full blown aggression. "I-I suppose you're right." She stammered, a lump thrumming at her throat. "Hunting seems like...like a preferable option." Her muzzle jerked to the side as she eyed his pelt. The more she looked at him, the more frail and skinny he appeared to be, and her fear was nearly instantaneously forgotten, and instead was replaced with concern for his well-being.

Shade's black and white pelt clung loosely to his skin, bones jutting out from beneath and appearing sharply at the wrinkles in his fur. There was an irregular pace to his breathing, ragged gasps of inhalation breaking through his furiously wrinkled muzzle. He glared at her, noticing her brown eyes flickering amongst his pelt, and a warning growl broke through his vibrating maw. Miley's eyes darted away, and she gave a stiffened nod. "I'll go hunt." She muttered, lashing her tail before vanishing into the undergrowth.

*Maybe he's just hangry*. She thought to herself, unable to resist the temptation to peer back to where the tom stood, his stiff poise slowly gathering itself for calmness. She spotted a faint flicker of regret in his eyes, but it vanished as if it weren't even there. Miley shook out her red fur, and prying herself out of the bush, she began searching for prey. The raucous cry of a crow burst into the air, and Miley's head whipped to the sky where the black bird had begun its descent from a bare tree, fluttering its wings before it landed with

brief unsteadiness onto the ground. It ruffled its feathers, before diving its beak into the snow in search for food.

*Perfect.* Miley thought to herself, wriggling into a crouch. Her stomach rumbled lightly, and she inwardly scolded herself for the interruption. Glancing at the bird, a rush of relief floundered over her. The crow had not heard the growls of her stomach, and remained stabbing at the ground with its beak. Ever so carefully, she slipped forward, her red fur a spotlight in the snow, however with silence she was nearly unnoticeable to her unsuspecting prey. Measuring her distance, she thrust herself into the air. A moment too late the crow saw her figure. It's wings fluttered in panic and it let out a terrified caw as Miley's paws slammed onto its spine. The bird battered helplessly at her unsheathed paws, and Miley delivered a swift blow to its neck. A moment later, the crow fell limp, and she picked it up in her jaws.

Miley's rumbling stomach begged her to eat the bird, but she dismissed it with a twitch of an ear, doing her best to ignore the watering flavors of the freshkill grasped between her teeth. In hopes to forget about her driving hunger, something she never had to face back in the twolegplace, she padded back in the direction of she and Shade's makeshift den, and felt a surge of pride rise in her chest. *I caught a crow!* She thought triumphantly, her tail arching over her back. She smiled through the mouthful of feathers, joy bringing a small bounce to her step.

Miley forced her way through a thick cluster of thistles, the thorns pricking at her thick fur and just grazing her skin. She ignored the small stings until she emerged between the roots of a large pine tree. Shade was already in the den, curled up into a ball with his tail wrapped around his muzzle. Miley cleared her throat in attempt to catch his attention, but to no avail, for he didn't move even a muscle.

The red tabby dropped her catch to the ground, and padded forward, prodding at his side. "Wake up!" She meowed, her voice long and hitched in attempt to wake him from annoyance. Successfully, Miley sat back as Shade irritably lifted his head, his amber eyes narrow slits as he glared at the kittypet.

"What is it?" He hissed, not even trying to pay attention to her. He lapped at a paw and drew it calmly over an ear, giving himself a small grooming as he awaited the she-cat's response.

Miley shifted on her haunches as he proceeded in cleaning himself, and she watched for a few pondering moments. "I caught something for you." She meowed, immediately diverting the black and white tom's attention.

"You did?"

Miley gave a nod, and he peered at the prey that lay at her paws. He let out a small grunt of satisfaction, his whiskers quivering. "For me?" He pressed lightly, a small glitter of eagerness in his deep amber eyes.

Miley gave an uncertain nod, and before she could speak further, the large tom had rushed forward, devouring the crow and ignoring the feathers that tickled his muzzle. Miley scratched her neck as Shade gulped down the remainder of the meat, his eyes glinting in satisfaction. He lifted his gaze to look at Miley with a new sense of respect, inclining his head in a small, grateful nod.

"Thank you." He meowed calmly, however a small purr shook his words.

Miley smiled in response. Any hostility that had been risen between the two that day had been stripped away just by one act of selflessness. With a relaxed sigh, Miley sat down only a small distance from Shade, her eyelids sliding shut as she drifted off into a comfortable slumber.

# Chapter Twelve

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Harvey lay in a* dead silence. The only sign of his life still clutched in his body was the ragged rise and fall of his bony flanks. His fur was clumped and torn, his bones visible through his thinly clinging pelt. His amber eyes were set astray, flickering amongst nothingness as shallow rasps of breath puffed from his constantly parted maw. His housefolk were concerned for his wellbeing, as he could tell. Their skinny paws poked and prodded at his fur, but he showed no mind, because he really didn't care. Although he did try to decipher what they were saying, and if he were listening close enough, he could've sworn he'd heard them discuss a collection of scrambled words that sounded of "vet," "bed," and "grief."

In his poor state, the brown kittypet had managed to slip through the clear flap. It had sent his stomach fluttering with fear, but he would do so anyways in hopes that Miley would reappear. Clearly though, she did not. And by every passing day, Harvey's faith in finding his friend faded to an oblivion, joy turning to sadness and a lack of will to live.

One of the twolegs, the female, padded over, a fake fish dangling from a string that was battered by paws from he and Miley's tussling. Grief rose in Harvey's throat like bile, and he turned away. The twoleg cooed softly, managing to catch Harvey's attention as she dangled it closer to the tom, but other than that the tom made no more reaction, turning away once more and laying his head sadly onto his paws.

Harvey's eyelids began drifting, up and down in a consecutive movement, until they slid shut. His breathing eased as he fell unconscious, his paws splayed out to the side. He was disturbed a moment later by a light breeze brushing against his spine, and he blindly lifted his head, his vision blurred and a ringing in his ears.

He could just make out somebody's shape, their ears perked up and tail swishing back and forth. Their jaw moved as they spoke, and Harvey felt his heart stop for a moment.

"Miley?" He rasped, blearily trying to adjust his eyes in attempt to identify the cat. "Is that you?"

He attempted to stagger to his paws, but he was unsuccessful as he crashed soundlessly towards the unseeable ground. He looked back to the cat only to realize that it was a tom. Harvey's vision was swept away and he awoke from the odd dream before he could process the cat's words, and he heaved a sigh as he once more felt the softness of his nest beneath his paws.

He rose his head to look at the ceiling, his heart tearing as sadness spilled silently over him. He tightened his paws beneath himself, and let out a choked whisper into the still air. "Oh, Miley...I miss you." He rasped. He lay his head down, letting out a small whimper as he gazed at his sprawled paws. *She could be hurt, hungry, or even worse... dead.* He thought to himself, nuzzling further into the crest of a forepaw as he sought out his own comfort.

As he murmured reassurance to himself, something closed around his side. Harvey let out a terrified caterwaul, flailing his paws in fear as one of his twolegs lifted him from his nest.

"No! Stop! Leave me alone!" He wailed, lashing out at the male twoleg as he cradled him close. In shock, the twoleg dropped Harvey, and the brown tom streaked away, desperately searching for someplace to hide. He dove into a parted doorway, and hid in a square cavern full of twoleg pelts. He felt his heartbeat slow, and he waited silently on top of a pile, his eyes flicking at the doorway as he contemplated how he would escape if one of his housefolk came to retrieve him once more.

*Oh, Miley...please come home soon.*

# Chapter Thirteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Small flakes of snow* swirled into the ThunderClan clearing with early rays of dawn sunshine glittering between them, the small particles landing on the ground in minuscule clumps, slowly stacking up to make piles upon piles of snow. The yellow tinged clouds that breezed above deposited the substance gradually, and from the cold, harsh coughs exploded into flurries from the medicine den. Leopardstalk and Twigpool were working their tails off in fear of the gradually spreading greencough, and glimpses of the two tom's frantic states were frequent.

Snowdrift emerged from the warriors den, snowflakes immediately drifting down and clamping onto his fur. Although invisible against his white pelt, he could still feel the cold clusters of snow gathering on his pelt, and he shook the loose pieces of frost to the ground, barely able to contain the chattering of his teeth against the biting cold. He breathed out a sigh, a plume of fog whisking around his muzzle at the exhalation, and he bushed up his fur to try and remain warm, although the attempt proved to be useless as a bitter gust of wind rushed across his pelt and sent him shivering once again.

Snowdrift lifted his head as a golden she-cat beckoned him over from beside the highledge, and he instantaneously obeyed, padding swiftly over to the deputy. The white tom gave a respectful dip of his head, and Littleshine let out a small chuckle.

"No need to be so formal, Snowdrift." The white and golden she-cat meowed, a slight trill to her mew.

Snowdrift shrugged, flicking an ear as he settled down in a sitting position beside the higher ranked she-cat. Littleshine looked up at the sky, where dawn light had sifted through the clouds and sent

rays of reddish sunshine into the hollow. Calmly, the deputy inclined her head to the side, averting her attention back to the white warrior. "You're up quite early." She acknowledged, flicking her tail against Snowdrift's flank to briefly catch his attention.

Once again, he shrugged, his blue eyes flicking in Littleshine's direction. "I suppose I am." He murmured, shuffling on his paws.

Searching desperately for a conversation starter, Littleshine scavenged for words, her jaws clamped shut for a few moments before speaking again, this time with humor rising her mew to a teasing purr. "So, Snowdrift. I've noticed you and Streamflower growing quite close. Have anything to say on that?" The golden cat quirked an interrogating brow, and Snowdrift felt his paws grow hot, and he began to fidget uncomfortably under her piercing stare.

"N-No." He stammered, looking at Littleshine with rounded eyes. "There has been no advancements to our relationship — er, friendship." He meowed, quickly correcting himself with a nervous duck of his head.

Snowdrift lowered himself to the ground as a small laugh burst from Littleshine's maw, a smile sprawled across her muzzle and a fretful frown across his.

"Snowdrift, it defeats the purpose of lying when you act all shamefully like that." She pointed out with a smile in her voice.

Snowdrift's neck bristled, and he shot an icy blue glare at her. "For StarClan's sake, Littleshine! Just let me contain both Streamflower and I's relationship for at least a moon before you come butting into it." He tilted his head to the side. "Please."

Littleshine huffed in amusement, her orange eyes glittering as she looked Snowdrift up and down. "Fine, fine. I'll keep your little secret." She shouldered him gently, and he let out a relieved chuckle, his fur lying flat. "Anyways, congratulations on finding yourself a mate!" Her eyes shimmered slightly with sadness, but it vanished as soon as Snowdrift spotted it.

The tom shook more flakes of snow from his fur. "Thanks." He

meowed, his tail tip flicking lightly. The two fell into silence as the clan gradually awoke, the squeals of Splinterkit and Beetlekit rising from their nests shattering the morning silence.

"Snowdrift," Littleshine finally acknowledged, snatching the warrior's attention. "Would you mind fetching Firesplash and Redspark for a hunting patrol? I'd like for you to take them out somewhat early today. We can't afford the snow to grow heavier and diminish any opportunity to catch our clanmates food."

Snowdrift inclined his head in an obedient nod, rising steadily to his paws. "Of course, Littleshine." He meowed. The deputy cast him a grateful smile as he padded back in the direction he came, and back into the warrior's den.

Treading lightly, the tom maneuvered his way around his clanmate's sleeping bodies, accidentally stepping on one of them.

"Hey! That was my paw!" Lilystripe snapped, her amber eyes flashing furiously in the dimly lit den.

Swallowing down an angry retort, Snowdrift apologetically dipped his head. "Sorry." He muttered, before turning around and resuming in his venture across the den. Finally, he arrived at a moss nest where a reddish-brown tom resided, his flanks lightly rising and falling as gentle snores racked through his chest.

Snowdrift prodded the tom in the side, and Redspark blearily lifted his muzzle, his eyelids fluttering as he focused his gaze on Snowdrift. "What is it?" He murmured, jaws gaping in a quick yawn.

Snowdrift tilted his head. "Littleshine would like for you to go on a hunting patrol with me." He meowed.

Redspark rose to his paws, arching his back in a stretch. "Alright." He said breathlessly, his whiskers quivering in anticipation. "I'll meet you outside in a little bit."

Snowdrift gave an appreciative nod, and went to find Firesplash, this time careful as to not step on anybody. Once finding the dark ginger she-cat, he made his way back out into the clearing. The trio

soon gathered, their fur bushed against the cold. As Littleshine had predicted, the flurries of snow strengthened, nearly blinding the patrol as they headed out of camp.

"Let's try the Sky Oak." Redspark suggested, his voice nearly carried away by the whistling wind. Both Snowdrift and Firesplash murmured their agreement, and the three trekked towards the towering oak tree.

Halfway there, Firesplash broke into a frenzy of hacking coughs, her body shuddering at each harsh sound that burst from her lungs. Snowdrift pricked his ears, resting his tail gently along the she-cat's hunched shoulders. "Are you alright?" He asked, worry tinging his mew.

Firesplash bobbed her head in a weak nod. "Y-Yeah." She rasped, flicking her ears dismissively. "I'm fine." She shouldered away Snowdrift's tail, and sped up, trying to force his mind away from her coughing. Billowing a small sigh, Snowdrift brushed his way back in the lead of the patrol, and led his two clanmates to the Sky Oak. Not long after, the trio had emerged into a small clearing with a huge oak placed in the dead center. It's branches were stretched to the sky, letting soft whistles fill the air as wind whipped through every nook and cranny between the crammed branches.

Snowdrift tasted the air, allowing the scents of the frosted forest to wash over him. He padded forward, lowering his muzzle as the faint scent of rabbit tickled his nose. Following the trail, he found a rabbit's burrow, and excitement rippled through his fur.

"Redspark! Firesplash!" He shouted, hoping his companions would hear his summons. A few heartbeats later, the two came pounding in his direction, panting briefly as he caught their attention. He beckoned the two forward and instructed them to surround the burrow, and they did, crouching against the ground and mimicking Snowdrift's silence.

After waiting for what felt like moons, a pink nose jutted out from the hole, followed soon by the whole rabbit. It snuffled along the ground as more rabbits began to emerge, their light brown pelts like spotlights against the snow.

*It's a burrow filled to the rim with rabbits!* Snowdrift thought, hungrily licking his chops. Once what he assumed was the whole burrow of rabbits has emerged, he gave a signal with his tail. Firesplash leaped over the burrow and let out a raspy yowl, startling the rabbits into racing in any open direction. Three pounded towards Snowdrift, and he burst from the snow as the prey neared. Their beady eyes rounded, the whites of their eyes showing in the midst of their terror. Quickly he slammed his paws down on two, dispatching them with quick bites as the third scampered away, it's haunches wet with a new scar from Snowdrift's lashing claws. Firesplash only caught one, for she had begun coughing in the middle of trying to catch a second, and Redspark caught two, making it three as he snagged the one Snowdrift had wounded and quickly ending its life with a snap of its neck.

The three were silent as they all caught their breath, sides heaving. The patrol exchanged triumphant smiles, joy fizzing around the atmosphere.

Redspark let out a delighted purr, his tail swishing joyfully back and forth. "That was an excellent catch!" He praised, pride beaming beneath his pelt.

Snowdrift nodded with a responding purr, his eyes glowing with achievement. "It truly was." He agreed. "Shall we head back to camp? This should be enough to feed nearly the whole clan."

Redspark and Firesplash dipped their heads in agreement, and each cat picked up two rabbits as they headed back into the blinding snow, padding in the direction of camp with pride bringing a bounce to each of their steps.

*I can't wait to put this on the freshkill pile.* Snowdrift thought gladly to himself. *Nobody will go hungry today!* Ruffling his fur, he cast a sidelong glance at his companions, whose eyes reflected his jubilant thoughts.

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By the time the trio had made it to the clearing, the wind had brewed down a little bit, but the snow itself grew even heavier.

Snowdrift could hardly see a whisker's length in front of himself as snowflakes whipped around his face, and he did his best to ignore the frosted flakes of frozen rain.

Firesplash coughed hoarsely, doubling over for a few long moments as she heaved for breath. Snowdrift eyed her in concern, and approached her gently. "You should go see Leopardstalk." He coaxed, trying to meet Firesplash's flickering gaze.

Firesplash opened her jaws to protest, but Snowdrift's hard gaze assured her into silence. Her head dropped, and she breathed out a hoarse sigh. "Fine." She rasped, her tail tip twitching irritably. Submissively, the ginger she-cat turned and padded to the medicine den, where Leopardstalk and Twigpool waited.

The bramble barrier rustled as the dawn border patrol burst in, their tails lifted pridefully into the air. Tilting his head to the side, Snowdrift watched as Mosspounce, Willowbush, Ravenheart, and Marigoldpaw padded confidently towards the highledge, where Pebblestar resided with his tail wrapped firmly across his forepaws. Snowdrift suddenly noticed fresh new scars dotting the patrol's fur, blood still oozing from the wounds, and he gave a small huff as he realized that there had been a border skirmish.

Marigoldpaw and Mosspounce seemed especially proud, the two cats puffing out their chest fur. The four crowded around the highledge, reporting what had happened to Pebblestar. And immediately pride swamped his smug expression.

"Good job." He meowed, raising his voice so all of ThunderClan could hear his praise. "That should've shown those WindClan mousebrains not to hunt in our territory." His eyes flashed indignantly, and Snowdrift felt a flutter in his stomach that told him that his leader's announcement wasn't entirely the truth.

Not wanted to arouse any unnecessary punishment, Snowdrift clamped his jaws shut rather than objecting to Pebblestar, and quickly he swiped his tail over his paws. "Hey Snowdrift!" A meow disrupted his posture, and he spun around, only to meet his eyes with Streamflower. His surprise melting into relief, he let out a purr.

"Hi, Streamflower." He trilled as his mate affectionately touched her nose to his.

The gray she-cat smiled, and tilted her head to the side. "Would you like to share a vole with me?" She offered kindly.

Snowdrift pondered for a moment, his eyes lighting up. "Of course!" He replied, pricking his ears.

Streamflower picked up a vole Snowdrift hadn't noticed at her feet, and the two padded towards the side of the clearing and chose a spot sheltered by the branches of a spindly oak. They both chewed at the vole, dividing it evenly between themselves. Swallowing down a mouthful of meat, Snowdrift flicked his gaze towards the gray she-cat, watching as she finished her share of the prey. She lifted her gaze and smiled at him, before quickly burying the bones of the vole.

"I'm a bit tired," Snowdrift meowed, stretching to his paws. "I'm going to go get some rest."

Streamflower gave a small nod. "I'll come, too." She mewed, arching her spine before following Snowdrift to the warriors den. The white tom settled down in his nest, placing his muzzle against his paws. Streamflower lay in her nest, which resided only a few claw-lengths away. Snowdrift listened as Streamflower's breathing slowed into an easy rise and fall, signifying that she had drifted off to sleep. Snowdrift soon followed suit, feeling sleep wrap over him.

He felt the ground shift beneath his paws, and in replacement of soft moss he felt an unknown material prick at his pads. *"Follow the brightest star, and it will lead you to a greater destiny. Pebbles the color of scarlet with wash upon the shore, leaving havoc and destruction in its path. Follow the brightest star, and all will be fine. The weather will rise and heal, to protect all from falling downhill."* A voice whispered, power to their ominous words. Snowdrift's eyes fluttered open, stars swirling around his head and flecking the sky with their light glow. In the center of the glowing dots, the brightest star Snowdrift had ever seen resided, sparkling down at him with a light so bright that it sent him shivering.

Suddenly, the stars were swept away by flurries of smoke, the black fog consuming them with a large puff. Yellow eyes found a place up in the now pitch black sky, and they glowed eerily down at the white tom. A cat's silhouette placed itself in front of the eyes, flames stretching up behind it and lapping furiously at the starless sky. Prickling fear cascaded over Snowdrift as the cat turned to face him, and a screech tore through the air as the cat launched at him, claws flashing. Snowdrift cried out as he was pummeled to the ground, and the weight vanished, only to be replaced by a sticky wet substance creeping up past him and holding him to the ground. Writhing in attempt to escape, Snowdrift was glued to the ground as he was swallowed by rivers of blood.

*"Follow the brightest star!"* A voice shrilled past the blood pouring into Snowdrift's ears.

*"Follow the brightest star!"*

Fire swept into one with the scarlet liquid, burning Snowdrift's skin with such pain and fury as blood pumped into his lungs. He writhed and fought for breath, gurgling as instead of air he breathed in blood, and his chest heaved desperately as the world began spinning around his drenched body.

*"Follow the brightest star!"*

Pebbles began raining from the concealed sky, pounding in around Snowdrift and soaking in with the blood. He released himself into the grasp of the flames and blood, giving up on trying to regain his breath.

*"Follow the brightest star!"*

And with the last repetition of that haunting phrase, everything turned dark, the scent of blood still lingering on Snowdrift's tongue.

# Chapter Fourteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Mouse padded onwards with* an air of confidence, his questionable ambition to find moss for his mother bringing an odd eagerness to his bouncing limbs. Every now and then, he encountered a few yellow covered twolegs poking around, and he hid in a bush to not get caught.

*Although Mist doesn't allow me out on my own, she still teaches me basic survival tactics.* Mouse thought to himself as he watched a twoleg yowl to another, pointing with an oddly colored stick to a large tree jutting out of the ground. The second twoleg padded over, shaking an odd metallic container and spraying a strange substance against the tree. Mouse cowered away, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the foreign creature's appalling actions. While the twolegs concerned themselves with the tree, Mouse darted along behind them and out of their vision.

As he strayed further into the forest, he found more and more things that astonished him. A rancid stench filled his nose and he physically recoiled, his fur bristling. A large creature lay crouched to the ground, glistening red skin with large round black paws that sank into the snow. It took a moment for Mouse to identify it as a monster from stories his mother told him, and immediately he felt shadowed with fear. Snowflakes had begun to drift from the sky as he silently crept past the terrifying beast, and his movement was interrupted by an earsplitting roar and a blinding flash of lights.

Mouse let out a screech of terror as the monster rumbled to life, its paws viciously churning against the snow. The small tom scrabbled to his paws and bolted as fast as he could, the roar of the monster pounding against his head. "Mist!" He wailed as he ran, his tail streaming behind him. He dove into a bush, shivering with fear as he crouched to the ground, his wide yellow eyes peering through

the loosely packed branches. The rumble of the monster faded into nothing as he waited, fear pounding against his chest.

Tentatively, he stepped out of the bush, his eyes darting too and fro. "Mist?" He mewled, hoping that his mother had gone out in search for him. He'd completely forgotten about the moss he'd set out to retrieve, and wanted nothing more than to get back home.

"Mist?" He called again, his voice shaking and growing weaker from the bitter cold. He just wanted to lie down and forget about anything that had happened. *I'll never find her!* He thought to himself, letting out another weak yowl. He collapsed to the ground with a shudder, wrapping his paws tightly around his muzzle.

Suddenly, a voice pierced the silence, and the tom-kit raised his head.

"*Mouse!* Mouse, where are you?"

Mouse quickly identified the voice to be Mist, and he let out a pitiful mewl in response to her frantic cries. The sound of snow crunching beneath somebody's paws filled Mouse's ears, and Mist came into view.

"Mouse?" She meowed loudly, her blue eyes flashing as she searched for him. Mouse lifted his head even higher, and his mother spotted him curled against the ground.

"Mouse!" The dappled she-cat exclaimed, darting forward and covering the tom-kit in worried licks. "Oh, my kit! You're okay, I'm here."

Mouse's rapid breathing gradually calmed, and he pressed himself against his mother for warmth. Mist grasped his scruff between her teeth, and began carrying him in the general direction of their den. When they finally reached it, she stopped, her jaw tightening and causing Mouse to shift in discomfort, kicking his legs through the air. What she saw she wished wasn't real, but the dread hollowing her belly confirmed that it was in fact real.

Twolegs were crawling throughout her den, poking and prodding at

the stone walls with odd lights on their heads. Mist quickly dropped Mouse to the ground, who started towards the den, but was stopped by one of Mist's paws blocking his way.

He looked curiously up at her, confusion hinted in his gaze. "Mist?"

Mist shook her head gently. "We can't head back home." She announced, her heart sinking like a rock. "We need to find someplace else to stay."

Mouse briefly pouted, not wanting to travel through the snow storm that had begun to rise. "Why?"

Mist shook her head once again, not responding as she lifted Mouse once more from the ground, snow whipping at her face as she began trudging through the white blanketed ground. After a long time of traveling, Mist finally placed Mouse onto the ground. His fur was tipped with icicles, and he quickly shook them away.

"Why can't we go home?" Mouse asked, his fur sticking into the air.

Mist shook her head, gently lapping her kit between the ears. "You're too young to understand, Mouse. Get some rest..." She trailed off, her voice hard a twinge of hurt mingled amongst the disappointment.

Mouse felt a surge of guilt. Obediently, he curled up against the cold earth, his ears flattening against his head.

*I never should've wandered off.*

# Chapter Fifteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*With excitement pounding against* her chest, Miley shot an eager look over her shoulder at Shade. "I can see it!" She meowed, nearly breathless as she flicked her gaze back towards the twolegplace's unnatural silhouette through the trees.

Her tail whipped through the air as Shade let out a responsive grumble, his shoulders hunch and tail trailing. As Miley looked back at him, he averted her gaze, his amber eyes narrowed to slits.

Miley faltered her steps, falling beside the black and white tom. Inclining her head, she searched his cast away gaze. "What's wrong?" She meowed tentatively.

Shade's head whipped around to stare at her, and with agitation he bared his teeth. "There's nothing wrong with me!" He snapped through gritted teeth, frustration flashing through his pelt.

Miley hesitantly took a pace back, stopping in her tracks with a paw still lifted into the air. "Are you sure?" She meowed as the tom pulled to a stop, the tip of his tail twitching back and forth.

"Yes! I'm fine!" He yelled, whirling around to face her with fury burning like flames in his eyes. "Let's just get you back to your friend and leave, okay?" His sides heaved with anger, his breath coming in pants. With a scowl at Miley, he spun around and charged back in the direction of twolegplace, fur on end.

Miley's gaze followed the fuming tom, before cautiously she bounded after him, her paws gliding over the snow covered ground. Her stomach began to twist as she realized that she actually did want to go with Shade. *But what about Harvey?* Her heart tore in two as she realized how distraught he might be. She had left

without a word, and his fear of the outdoors wouldn't make his concern for her any better.

Breaking into a run, the red tabby raced past Shade, her brown eyes glittering as she streaked across the snow. In a few bounds, she was on top of a fence, the wood wobbling beneath her as she crouched to it. Snow sprayed onto the ground as the fence shook, and when it finally stilled, Miley cautiously rose to her paws. Looking back into the forest, she could see Shade standing stiffly, his amber eyes flashing as he watched her. Giving a small dip of her head, Miley began to bound across the fence, searching for her garden.

Den by den she searched, her ears pinning back as she fretted upon where she was.

"Don't worry, Harvey." She muttered to herself as she stared down into another garden. "I'll be back soon."

After what felt like hours, she found a den that looked quite familiar. A stone jutted out in the center of the yard, and Miley's eyes grew round. She crouched on the fence, beginning to tremble as she was quickly overwhelmed by the thought that she was finally back home. Breathing deeply, she dropped into the snow, her paws sinking into the freezing substance. Warily she padded forward, her ears pricked as she touched her nose to the door's flap.

*Here goes nothing*. She pushed forward, emerging into unnatural twoleg light. Scents swamped over her, and she looked around. "Harvey?" She meowed, padding forward. Finding his nest, she sniffed the soft material, discovering his scent to be stale.

"Harvey? Where are you?" Miley turned her head, her brown gaze glittering with concern. Her tail lashed back and forth with frustration, and she sniffed the ground beside the nest.

Catching a faint trace of her friend, she began to follow the scent trail. It let up to a slightly parted doorway. It was dark on the inside, and carefully she ducked her head inside.

"Harvey?" She meowed, her voice soft in the still air. "Are you in here?"

A rustle broke through the silence, and there was a flash of amber eyes.

"Miley?"

Miley instantly recognized the voice to belong to Harvey, and she smiled.

"Yes, Harvey?"

The tom-cat padded from the shadows, his form lowered to the ground. His fur was unkempt and clung loosely from his pelt, and his eyes were uncertain as they flicked to Miley.

"Is this really you?" He rasped, his nose quivering as he sniffed the air for her scent.

Guilt wrenched at Miley's chest, and she gave a brisk nod. "Yes, it is me." She meowed, stepping forward and pressing her nose comfortingly against Harvey's. The tom stiffened, and gradually rose to his paws.

"It's really you!" He wailed joyously, butting his head against hers. His mew cracked with happiness, and Miley's heart tore in two as she let out a purr.

"It's good to see you again, Harvey." She meowed, stepping away from her friend.

Inclining his head to the side, Harvey looked her up and down, inspecting her red fur. "Where have you been? You smell of the forest."

Miley grinned. "That's because I was in the forest!"

Taking a pace back, Harvey's eyes grew as round as twin moons. "No." he gasped in disbelief.

Miley nodded. "I sure did! I was following a stray, and we got snowed in! He taught me how to hunt and everything." Her eyes flashed. "Why don't you come and meet him?" She pressed, her head tipping to the side.

Hesitantly, Harvey agreed. "Alright."

With a swipe of her tail, Miley led the way towards the door flap. She pushed through, emerging into the bitter cold of the outside.

Harvey remained on the inside, only poking his face through so he could speak. "Miley, can't he just come inside?"

Miley shook her head. "He doesn't like twoleg nests."

With fear glittering in the tom's eyes, Harvey gingerly placed a paw into the snow, the rest of his body following soon after. His fur was spiked and on end as he cautiously followed behind Miley, letting out muffled whimpers.

Reassuringly, Miley touched the tip of her tail to Harvey's shoulders, leaping onto the fence and guiding him up beside her. "Shade!" She called into the trees, finding no sign of the tom's presence.

She leaped down from the fence, leaving Harvey shivering on top of it. "Shade, get your tail over here!"

The red tabby trotted forward, only to be greeted by the black and white tom.

"Are you ready to leave?" Shade hissed, his ears flattened against his skull.

Miley shook her head. "No, not yet. Come here, let me introduce you to my friend!"

She led the black and white tom towards the fence, where Harvey had finally leapt down, his eyes round with fear as he stared at the forest around him.

"Shade, this is Harvey. Harvey, this is Shade."

Harvey stopped freaking out over his surroundings for a few moments, lifting his amber gaze to meet with Shade's. A silence passed over the two tom-cats, Shade's eyes narrowing to slits.

"Alright. I met your friend, let's go now." He black and white tom growled, turning around to leave.

Harvey's eyes shot towards Miley. "You're leaving me?" He exclaimed. "But you just came back! Please don't go."

His tone was filled with desperation and fear, and Miley's ears pinned back.

"H-Harvey, please, hear me out." She meowed, stepping towards the brown tom, who had begun to tremble again.

"You're going to abandon me, Miley." He whispered, looking at his friend with wide eyes. "Why?"

Miley felt choked with guilt, and sadly she bowed her head. "I don't want to live with housefolk anymore, Harvey." she admitted softly. "After my experience out here in the wilderness, I realized that there's more to life than just our twolegs." She lifted her gaze to stare at her friend, and he met it with sorrow.

"Harvey, will you come with Shade and I?" Miley burst out, stepping desperately towards her friend. "I know you'll like it out here, Harvey. Please."

Harvey stumbled back, letting out a whimper. "Why are you making me choose, Miley? I hate the outdoors, but I hate being alone even more. Please don't make me choose."

Miley shook her head. "I'm sorry, Harvey."

Harvey let out a small wail, and Shade stepped forward with a sharp glare. "Quit whining like a kit and just make the decision. It's as easy as that!" He snapped.

Harvey bared his teeth at the tom, stepping back. "You did this! This is your fault!"

Miley stepped between the two toms, her red tail lashing. "It's nobody's fault but my own! This is my decision, Harvey. You can come with us or you can stay." She stared at her friend.

Harvey squeezed his eyes shut, huddled against the fence. "I-I don't know, Miley." He whispered. Moments passed in silence. Shade was furiously pacing back and forth, and Miley was anxiously waiting for Harvey's answer.

Finally, the tom spoke, his voice shaking. "I-I'll come with you, Miley. I'll come." He rose unsteadily to his paws, his fur on end. Shade let out a disdainful huff and turned around, his tail flicking.

"Let's go, then." He growled, pacing forward.

Gleefully, Miley brushed her pelt against Harvey's. "Thank you, Harvey!" She meowed, her eyes glittering happily as they padded away from the twolegplace.

Harvey gave a silent nod, his head bowed and eyes flicking amongst the trees.

"So, Shade.." Miley looked curiously at the black and white tom as he led the way through the trees. "Where are we going?"

Shade paused in his movement, glancing over his shoulders at the inquisitive she-cat. A small smile spread across his face.

"We'll be following the brightest star of the night." Was all he replied with, before plunging between some brambles.

Miley stared after him for a few moments, dumbfounded as a voice whispered into her mind.

*" I see you have made the decision. Good luck, young kittypet. "*

Brown fur flickered at the corners of her vision, stars dappling it and emitting a soft glow. Before she could turn and see what it was, it vanished into a small wisp, a vague trace of the tom from her dreams lingering in the air.

**The journey has now begun.**

# Chapter Sixteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*"I don't get it." Streamflower* meowed, her honey yellow gaze glittering with concern as Snowdrift explained his dream to her. The two lay in their separate nests, Streamflower's tail swishing back and forth. "Are you sure you don't need to speak to Leopardstalk or Twigpool?"

Snowdrift shook his head as frustration flashed beneath his pelt, and he gently nuzzled the she-cat's cheek. "I'm sure I shouldn't speak to them." He reassured. "I think this dream was meant for only the two of us to figure out, and nobody else." Streamflower looked at him doubtfully, but let out a reluctant sigh nonetheless.

"Alright. I'm going to go hunting. The freshkill pile is in need to be stocked." Snowdrift nodded in agreement, rising to his feet and trailing after her. Now that Firesplash and Willowbush, whom were two of the best hunters in the clan, had gotten greencough, the clan needed to send out more frequent patrols. Prey was running low and ThunderClan needed to be well fed in order to maintain good health.

The two warriors set off across the clearing, leaving the camp and heading in the direction of the WindClan border. The previous snowfall had eased to a stop, and a chilly wind whisked through the air. Snowdrift managed to catch a thrush with the help of Streamflower, before catching an odd scent drifting along the breeze.

Lifting his head, Snowdrift pinpointed the direction the smell was coming from, his ears pricked up with alarm. "Do you smell that?" He asked anxiously, his pelt prickling. Streamflower parted her jaws as she tasted the air, lifting a paw from the ground.

"Yes, I do." She meowed firmly, her eyes narrowing. She slipped forward, padding through the undergrowth as she tracked the smell. Snowdrift followed along, sniffing the trail before finally spotting a lump of gold and white fur through the low hanging branches of an oak tree.

Streamflower let out a mortified gasp, and Snowdrift darted forward, his gaze fixating on the figure on the ground.

"Littleshine!" The white tom exclaimed, dashing forward and standing before the corpse. With a strangled cry of grief, his knees buckled and he buried his nose into her cold fur.

Streamflower stood, frozen with dread as she stared at the dead deputy. She leaned forward, gently touching the tip of Snowdrift's ear. "Snowdrift," she breathed, her voice raspy with sorrow. "We have to take her back to camp."

Snowdrift met her gaze, holding it for a few moments. With a grim nod, he grasped Littleshine's limp scruff between his jaws, while Streamflower took a hold of her haunches. Together, the two hauled her back to camp, her dull amber eyes staring up at the sky and her dangling ears snagging briefly on the brambles of the camp entrance as they stumbled into the clearing. Snowdrift was nearly blinded by grief as he dropped her to the ground, nearly collapsing with her as a wave of sadness overtook him.

An eerie silence had fallen over the camp the moment they had stepped into it. Leopardstalk's head poked out of his den, and his gaze darkened as he noticed what lay at the two's paws. Darting forward, the black tom began to sniff along her fur. His green eyes sharpened, and he looked up at the two.

"Where did you find her?"

Snowdrift swallowed, his voice trembling as he answered the medicine cat. "B-By the WindClan border." He rasped, staring at the ground. Leopardstalk nodded, backing away and vanishing back into his den.

He came back out a few moments later, carrying a bundle of herbs

firmly between his teeth. Dragging the corpse to the center of the clearing, he groomed the she-cat's fur, shifting her body to make it look as if she were only sleeping. Placing her gently down, Snowdrift finally processed the presence of another cat laying beside Littleshine. The tom's pale yellow and black fur was ruffling slightly in the breeze. Shimmerbranch sat beside him, paying no mind to the fact that the deputy was dead as well.

Her shoulders shook as sobs escaped her curled lips, her head pressed into Paleclaw's fur. *He must've died of greencough*. Snowdrift realized, bowing his head. Shimmerbranch's kits would never meet their father once they were born. Padding silently to the center of the clearing, Snowdrift sat down beside the two corpses, his head lowered in silence as he grieved with his gathering clan. Leopardstalk and Twigpool were conversing in hushed tones at the edge of the clearing.

Snowdrift, although seemingly staring at the corpse of Littleshine as his clanmates shuffled around to pay their respects to Paleclaw and Littleshine, his eyes were flicking back and forth along the ground. Suddenly, a gray paw was placed next to him, and he nearly jumped out of his fur before realizing that it was Mosspounce. Snowdrift let his fur lie flat and clenched his jaw. Mosspounce's narrowed eyes flicked over to the white tom, before staring back down at Littleshine, briefly touching his nose to her pale fur. Night was quickly approaching, the sun low and casting brilliant lights into the camp.

Snowdrift calmed himself down with a small, although quick breath, shifting a bit uncomfortably. He returned his thoughts to a concerning matter at paw that was not to do with the deaths of his clanmates, and he took a deep breath. He could decipher what the prophecy, as he assumed it was, meant by far. It meant he needed to 'follow the brightest star', which quite obviously had to be the brightest star in the sky. And clearly, the scarlet pebble was Pebblestar. He shuddered involuntarily, and a few concerned glances were cast in his direction. Snowdrift forced a small, however sad smile at the worried cats, and they resumed the vigil as they silently grieved over their clanmates. *But what's the greater destiny?* He thought to himself, his white tail brushing lightly

against the snowy ground. Mosspounce shifted beside him, and Snowdrift's gaze darted over to the tom as his thoughts were pulled to a quick stop.

Did Mosspounce have anything to do with it? *What if he killed Littleshine?*

Before Snowdrift was able to think about it any further, a demanding yowl echoed throughout the clearing. "You all know the routine, gather around the highrock!" Pebblestar snapped, his yellow eyes narrowed sharply. Tortoisefoot was the first to separate himself from the two bodies, silently approaching the high ledge where the leader stood. The clan soon followed, grief hanging over them like a cloud.

Pebblestar raked his gaze along the crowd, his gray spotted tail swatting back and forth. "As you all know, two deaths have occurred today in ThunderClan. Paleclaw and Littleshine have passed on to StarClan. And now, since our previous deputy is dead, I am required to appoint our clan a new one." Pebblestar cleared his throat. "Mosspounce, if you would please step forward." Mosspounce had a surprised look pass over his expression as he quickly stepped forward, gathering his surprise and giving himself a calm composure.

He blinked up at his leader, eyes calm and with a hint of eagerness. "Yes, Pebblestar?" He meowed.

"I say these words before the spirit of Littleshine, so that she will hear and approve of my choice in our replacement deputy. Mosspounce, do you promise to remain loyal to your clan and obey your leader, even at the cost of your life?"

Mosspounce's lips curled to show his teeth as a grin spread across his face. "I do." He meowed, his ears extended forward.

Pebblestar dipped his head. "Then by the powers of StarClan, Mosspounce is now the new deputy."

The clearing was silent for a moment as cats questioned why a warrior without an apprentice was appointed deputy, their hushed

murmurs echoing Snowdrift's thoughts. Suddenly, a voice broke through the crowd, pride warming their voice. "Mosspounce!" Streamflower yowled, beginning the chant as warriors gradually joined in. Mosspounce puffed out his chest as he was flooded with warm congratulations, smiling. Snowdrift approached as he slid into pace beside Streamflower, his fur brushing against hers as they neared the new deputy.

"Congratulations!" Streamflower purred, butting her head against Mosspounce's. "I'm so proud of you."

Mosspounce purred. "Quit acting like our mother." He teased kindly, gently swatting his paw over her ears.

Streamflower laughed. "I'd rather not!" She bit back, smiling. "I can't believe you're deputy!"

"Neither can I." Mosspounce confessed, smirking at Snowdrift as a frown entered the white tom's face.

"Since this is such a happy occasion..." Streamflower began, acting as if she had forgotten the two other warrior's deaths. "I'd like to tell you that me and Snowdrift have become mates!"

Mosspounce froze for a moment, his green eyes sharpening. "Oh." He meowed stiffly, his eyes flickering over to Snowdrift. "Well... congratulations." His voice was cold.

Snowdrift nodded. "Thank you." Was all that he said, forcing his fur to lie flat.

Mosspounce scowled for barely even a moment before returning to his gleeful expression. Streamflower didn't seem to notice this, but Snowdrift sure did. "You two should head back to your nests. It's getting pretty late." The gray and white tom angled his ears towards the sky, which had darkened aside from the few clouds dotting it with a pink glow.

"Great idea." Streamflower purred to her littermate. "Let's go, Snowdrift." She ushered Snowdrift along, who stumbled over his paws.

"But wait! What about..." *Littleshine and Paleclaw?* He trailed off, not finishing his sentence as he craned his neck to look as Mosspounce. The tom glared at him, a vicious look to his eyes, before spinning around and scrambling up to the high ledge where Pebblestar awaited. Snowdrift shuddered, and raced to catch up with Streamflower who had already ducked inside the warriors den.

# Chapter Seventeen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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Snowdrift rose from his nest, shaking loose moss from his pelt. A call came from outside of the warriors den, and immediately cats began stirring and mumbling. It had been two days since Paleclaw and Littleshine had died, and everybody had already grown used to Mosspounce being in control. The gray and white tom was a bit immature at times, but aside from those moments he was an okay deputy.

Before anybody else could stand and cause difficulty to leave the den, Snowdrift maneuvered his way through the warriors to the exit. He quickly left the den and blinked in surprise. The snow was melting, turning into slush as it squished beneath his paws. *That's odd. It was freezing just the other day.* He shook out his pelt as a droplet of water splashed onto his fur, and he frowned up at the branch that drooped above him. He sighed, and padded swiftly to the highledge where both Mosspounce and Pebblestar stood calmly.

Pelt prickling in curiosity, Snowdrift sat down, wrapping his tail neatly around his paws. Obviously something important was going on, and he didn't entirely want to miss it. Slowly, cats entered the clearing, their eyes growing round as they settled down. Yellowtuft left the medicine den and walked into the clearing, his greenish-brown eyes unfocused as he obviously left from visiting his sisters, who were ill with greencough. Streamflower found her place beside Snowdrift, pressing her pelt against his as a purr rumbled in her throat.

Suddenly, Splinterkit and Beetlekit came racing out of the nursery, their fur groomed neatly — at least until Splinterkit tackled Beetlekit to the ground as they broke into a play fight. Leaningwhisker quickly followed after the two kits, her pale brown fur on end.

"Beetlekit! Splinterkit!" She scolded, startling the two kits into looking at her. "Look at what you've done! You ruined your fur." She limped over to the two, one of her forepaws twisted at an odd angle. She scooped Splinterkit towards herself, lightly nipping his ear. The white and brown tom squeaked as Leaningwhisker groomed his fur back down, Beetlekit snickering at his brother's suffering.

Leaningwhisker paused for a moment to frown at Beetlekit. "You need to be washed as well. Redspark! Get your tail over here!" She yowled. The reddish colored tom perked up, his head aimed in the direction of his mate. He raced forward to meet her, scooping up Beetlekit who let out a startled yelp, kicking and squirming as he didn't want to be washed. Snowdrift chuckled, his blue eyes glowing in amusement.

Pebblestar let out a loud growl, catching the clan's attention. Beetlekit's squealing stopped and any conversations faltered, eyes staring expectantly up at the clan leader. "Today is an... *important* day." He said coldly, his hard gaze staring at the two kits. Splinterkit pulled himself away from his mother and looked up at Pebblestar with widened eyes, his red and brown tail spiked up in excitement, however it could as easily be mistaken for fear. "Two apprentices will be announced today. Splinterkit, Beetlekit, please step forward."

Beetlekit yanked himself free from Redspark, glaring at his father before catching up with Splinterkit as the tom had already began trotting forward. Leaningwhisker's jaws parted in a protest, before thinking better of it and closing her mouth, her tail only lashing back and forth.

Pebblestar scrambled down from the highledge, sending rocks tumbling down with him. A few cats backed away so they wouldn't get hit, but most just stayed put as a few rocks showered over them. Pebblestar towered over Splinterkit and Beetlekit, his yellow eyes narrowed at the two kits. First, he placed a paw on top of Splinterkit's tiny paw, the kit trembling in excitement.

"Splinterkit, from this day onward until you become a warrior, you will be known as Splinterpaw. Your mentor is Mosspounce." The

newly made apprentice beamed eagerly, his eyes as round as moons. Suddenly, he let out a startled scream, his eyes welling up with tears as he tried to pull his paw away from Pebblestar.

"St-Stop it!" He screeched, his eyes squeezing shut as he jerked and pulled, desperately trying to remove Pebblestar's paw, now unsheathed, from his foot. "It-It hurts!" Snowdrift leaped to his paws, his fur on end. An outraged yowl came from Leaningwhisker. She leaped forward, but was stopped by Redspark, who murmured something indecipherable to her. Finally, the queen backed down, her head bowed and her tail lashing. A few growls rose through the gathered clan, however nobody made a move against the powerful leader. Beetlekit cowered as his brother cried out in pain, his ears pinned back as he watched his littermate.

Snowdrift was ready to go forward and stop Pebblestar, however his mate stopped him. "Snowdrift, don't. I don't want him to punish you." Streamflower murmured quietly. Snowdrift swallowed, and with a short nod he sat down, even though he shifted restlessly.

Finally, Pebblestar tore his paw away from Splinterpaw's, blood smeared onto it. Splinterpaw stopped crying out, but broke into pained sobs as he held his bloody paw close to himself, trembling greatly as tears poured from his eyes. Beetlekit made to back away, but was stopped as Pebblestar's blood soaked paw slammed down on his. Beetlekit stiffened, his eyes meeting with Pebblestar's.

"Beetlekit," Pebblestar began, his voice loud and clear. "From this day onward until you become a warrior, your name will be Beetlepaw. Your mentor shall be Yellowtuft." Just like before, Pebblestar unsheathed his claws and dug them into Beetlepaw's skin, blood already welling up. Beetlepaw however kept his jaws shut, refraining from crying out. Instead, he trembled in pain, his lips quivering. After some time had passed, Pebblestar released his grip.

"Mosspounce, Yellowtuft, come forward." Mosspounce leaped down from the highledge, swiping his tail against the ground as he dipped his head respectfully to Pebblestar. Yellowtuft uncertainly removed himself from the crowd, gulping as he too dipped his head to Pebblestar. Pebblestar's tail twitched, and Mosspounce touched his

nose to Splinterpaw's forehead, who was too scared to react. Yellowtuft followed Mosspounce's lead, and touched his nose to Beetlepaw's.

Pebblestar smirked, kinking his tail. "Clan dismissed!" He yelled, making his way back up the highledge and into the small cave that was his den. Mosspounce raised his tail above his head as the gathered cats shifted towards him to be assigned on patrols.

"Yellowtuft, Beetlepaw, Snowdrift, and..." his gaze flicked dismissively past Streamflower. "Ravenheart," Ravenheart pricked her ears. "And of course Marigoldpaw," Mosspounce added quickly. "I would like for the four of you to patrol by the WindClan boundary. I've been getting recent reports on them crossing the border."

Ravenheart and Yellowtuft nodded in sync, as the five cats quickly left the crowd to meet at the bramble entrance.

# Chapter Eighteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Mouse plodded forward, guilt* still wrenched in his chest. His shoulders were squared and his head was lowered to the ground as he trailed along behind Mist. His legs felt wobbly and ached horribly, but he didn't dare make a protest to his mother for he feared angering her, since he'd already done enough with sneaking away without her permission.

Suddenly, the lightly dappled she-cat pulled to an abrupt stop, Mouse tumbling into her heel with a startled squeak. Carefully, Mist pulled her leg forward and away from Mouse, causing the tom-kit to tumble into the ankle deep snow, which happened to be belly dee for the young cat. Mist flicked her tail over Mouse's ears, her whiskers quivering as she tasted the air. "We'll rest here." She meowed calmly, turning tail and nudging the kit forward. Mouse looked down, his eyes growing round.

"In a rabbit's burrow?" He meowed uncertainly, blinking up at his mother in slight fear.

Mist nodded. "For your safety." She replied calmly, her tail swishing back and forth.

Mouse stepped towards the hole, peering down into the murky darkness. "Where will *you* stay?" He asked, tipping his head curiously as he noted how small the tunnels seemed to be — it would definitely not be able to fit a fully grown cat.

Mist exhaled, her blue eyes narrowing. "In that bush over there." She said firmly, indicating towards a nearly bare bush with it's leaves nearly entirely stripped away from its branches from the leafbare season.

"Oh." Mouse responded, his yellow eyes flicking over to the bush. *It's close enough.* He reassured himself, even though the thought didn't give him any more comfort. Fear squirmed in the pits of his stomach.

"Go inside. I'm off to go hunting, I'll be back later." Mist meowed commandingly, nudging Mouse forward with her muzzle. Mouse skidded into the den, falling a few mouse-lengths before plopping on the dirt ground. His gaze followed Mist as she turned and padded away. He swallowed, looking around at the small space as a small shower of dirt tumbled down to him.

"This is gonna be a long day..." he muttered quietly to himself, curling up into a ball and wrapping his tail around his muzzle.

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Dirt spilt down on Mouse's sleeping form, grit tumbling between his fur. He lifted his head, blinking warily as a shadow was cast over the entrance of the rabbit's burrow. A sudden burst of fear crept into his chest, and he scrambled back, keeping low to the ground as to not bump his head and send the ceiling collapsing. Suddenly, a blue eye gazed down into the dark hole.

"Mouse, come on out." Mist mewed softly, her breath billowing down. Relief washing over him, Mouse crinkled his nose, not too fond of how his mother's breath smelt. He shook away the thought, and Mist quickly backed away so Mouse could fit through. Slowly, the kit made his way out of the hole, his fur clumped and tangled as pieces of earth knotted it's way into his brown and white fur. Quickly, he shook his pelt in hopes to clean it at least a little bit, but to no avail. He blinked up at Mist, who carried a scrawny rabbit in her jaws. She dropped it to the ground, stepping back so her kit could have his share.

Mouse knelt down and took a large bite out of the rabbit, trying to finish it as quickly as possible. The heavy feeling of silence was weighing down on his shoulders, and it wasn't the good kind, either. Quickly, he finished the piece of freshkill in a few large bites, before backing away so his mother could have her share. Mist picked it up and carried it over to the bush she'd claimed to stay at,

settling down quietly in a comfortable position.

Mouse crawled back into the rabbit's burrow, smoothing his fur in hopes not to get anything knotted in it. He curled back up, exhaustion suddenly weighing down on him. His eyelids drooped, and his jaw parted in a yawn, before he closed his eyes and fell to sleep.

He woke up in an odd clearing. The grass was a beautiful shade of green, however tinted with a starry white, and thriving trees stretched endlessly into the sky, sunlight filtering through their leaves and dappling the ground. A small breeze ruffled through the branches, and there was a large scent of prey, however the scent of a cat mingled with it. As if on queue, a black tabby tom padded forward from between a few trees, his fur was smoothed calmly and stars glittered around his dark fur. Mouse immediately recognized the tom as Darkblaze from his previous dream, and a prickle of discomfort rushed beneath his fur. *Reoccurring dreams aren't normal.* He thought to himself, his eyes narrowing at the dark tabby. *Maybe it actually means something.*

"Why am I here?" The kit asked immediately after his thoughts, his fur rising in discomfort. Darkblaze looked at him solemnly, his sharp amber eyes glowing with an eerie light.

"You and your mother must follow the brightest star of the night." The strange tom replied simply, briefly shrugging his shoulders.

Mouse tilted his head to the side, his jaws parted slightly as he hesitated in his response. "And if I don't?"

Darkblaze narrowed his eyes to slits, looking over at the tom-kit. "If you don't, you'll never have a home again." He meowed coldly, his ears twitching slowly in every direction.

Mouse stiffened, unable to stop himself from jumping a few mouse lengths into the air. "Never? Again?" He cried, fear springing into his chest at the thought of always being on the move, never living in one area. *That's no home!*

Darkblaze nodded, knowing he had struck a nerve. "Never again."

He echoed quietly, settling down into a sitting position as he avoided the kit's gaze. Finally, he looked into Mouse's yellow eyes. "When you follow the brightest star, you will find cats whom you can trust. Cats who will risk their lives for the sake of yours, and cats who will welcome you to their home with open paws. You will be safe, and have a place to live amongst those of the rising weather."

Mouse's racing heart seemed to stop for a moment, his eyes growing wide at the tom's words. "Really..?" He asked in a hushed tone, his fur smoothing out. Darkblaze gave a small, and encouraging smile.

"Really." He meowed, his voice tainted with honesty, along with a sliver of hopefulness.

Mouse tore his gaze away from Darkblaze's, feeling as if there was a lump in his throat. "How do I convince Mist?" He asked in a hushed tone, his tail lowering close to the ground, his paws shuffling uncomfortably.

"Your mother?" Darkblaze meowed after a moment of thought, his head tipping greatly to the side as he gazed at the kit. Mouse nodded eagerly, his whiskers quivering. Mist probably wouldn't believe him, and tell him to stop daydreaming. Darkblaze slowly angled his head so that he could face Mouse. "I'll visit her in a dream. In the morning, bring it up to her." He said, his tail twitching in satisfaction with himself.

Mouse smiled. "Okay!" he chirped, raising his tail into the air. Darkblaze let out a soft chuckle, and gave the kit a brisk lick between the ears in a fatherly fashion, smoothing down a tuft of hair that had stuck out.

"Good luck, young Mouse." The tom meowed, a smile curling into his expression. Mouse nodded in response, and before he knew it, a blinding flash of light had emitted throughout the clearing, consuming his vision in less than a heartbeat.

# Chapter Nineteen

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Snowdrift padded quickly along*, snow crunching beneath his paws. Yellowtuft was instructing his new apprentice on where they were in the territory, and the direction they were going in order to reach the WindClan border. Ravenheart and Marigoldpaw were walking silently forward, Ravenheart in the lead while her apprentice padded in sync with Snowdrift, however taking longer strides in order to keep up with the warrior. The trees began to clear out a little more as they neared the border, before opening up into a plains. Beetlepaw squealed in excitement, forgetting entirely about the pain in his paw as he bolted forward.

"Beetlepaw! Wait!" Yellowtuft yowled. He ran forward after the apprentice. Snowdrift tipped his head curiously before realization sprang into his mind. *The river!* Snowdrift launched himself forward, pelting after the apprentice as his heart leaped in his chest. *Great StarClan, he's going to fall!* The white tom realized, his eyes growing round. Quickly, Snowdrift dove beneath a bush instead of going around it, brambles snagging in his fur. He ignored the sting of pain inflicted from the thorns as he rushed to stop Beetlepaw, who eagerly raced to see the moor.

"Beetlepaw!" Snowdrift screeched as he saw the apprentice pull to a sudden, skidding stop, his paws scrabbling for a hold in the slippery snow with his claws unsheathed. Splotches of blood from his paw smeared against the cold material as he fought for balance, and Snowdrift flung himself towards Beetlepaw in attempt to grab the apprentice. Yellowtuft made it before him, clasping his jaws around the young cat's scruff before he could slip any further. He hauled the kit away from the ledge, firmly holding him by the scruff as he scrambled back and away from the rushing water. He placed Beetlepaw down on the ground a safe distance away, smoothing

down his chest fur with a quick lick.

Snowdrift darted forward to make sure everything was okay, his fur on end. Yellowtuft's eyes were round in shock as immediately he began sniffing along Beetlepaw's fur. He swayed on his paws in relief as he let out a sharp breath from between gritted teeth.

Suddenly, Yellowtuft straightened, his eyes narrowing sharply as he locked his gaze firmly on the young cat. "Beetlepaw." He growled sternly, his yellow tail flicking furiously back and forth. "Do *not* run off like that again. Do you understand?"

Beetlepaw didn't respond, trembling from ear to tail tip.

Yellowtuft cuffed the apprentice over the ear. "I said, do you understand?" He snapped furiously, clearly outraged from fear and frustration.

Beetlepaw gave a shaky nod, looking up at Yellowtuft as he let out a small whimper. "I-I understand." He stammered, puffing out his chest in an attempt to seem brave, however his wide amber eyes and trembling form clearly showed his fear.

Yellowtuft's shoulders sagged, and he puffed out a sigh. "I'm sorry, Beetlepaw." He murmured, briefly touching his nose to Beetlepaw's brown tipped ear. "Just...don't do anything like that again. I don't want anything to happen to you. You're too young." Yellowtuft blinked down at the apprentice who gave a short nod.

"Yes Yellowtuft." He meowed, his voice nearly inaudible. Ravenheart padded forward, given her fur a quick shake. The black she-cat placed a paw forward, clearing her throat abruptly.

"I know that was a shocking moment, but we have to finish this patrol. What would Pebblestar think?" Beetlepaw ducked his head, staring silently at the ground. Snowdrift noticed the slightest twitching back and forth of the small apprentice's tail, and sympathy welled up in his chest. Beetlepaw would obviously be holding a grudge against Pebblestar. The leader had harmed he and his brother.

Yellowtuft's ears flicked up, however one of them was angled slightly to the side. "You're right." He meowed. "Let's continue."

Ravenheart gave a dip of her head, and proceeded in leading the patrol. Beetlepaw trailed along, his eyes focused on the snowy ground. Snowdrift quickly marked a tree, brushing his pelt against the bark and spreading his scent onto it. Yellowtuft gently instructed Beetlepaw on how to properly mark the boundary. Either by 'spraying', a more unused tactic, or rubbing against an object.

At around midway between sunhigh and Sunset, Snowdrift and the others had finished the patrol. Marigoldpaw had managed to catch a water vole, and kept it for the clan.

"Lets start heading back." Yellowtuft suggested, his whiskers quivering as Beetlepaw skipped ahead a few paces, stopping to cast a glance warily over his shoulders. Marigoldpaw blinked at the tom, the vole she had caught dangling from her jaws bouncing a little bit in her grasp.

Ravenspring murmured her agreement to Yellowtuft, and the patrol began their way back to camp. Snowdrift suddenly stopped, his paws splayed as an unnerving scent caught in his scent glands. *WindClan.* He looked back, but saw nothing. He quickly rushed forward to meet his clanmate's pace as they padded back to camp, nobody seeming to have noticed the opposing clan's scent.

Back at camp, Marigoldpaw dropped her vole into the freshkill pile, and the patrol dispersed. Yellowtuft obviously went to the medicine to check on his littermates, while the others did their own thing. Snowdrift spotted Streamflower discussing an unknown topic with Mosspounce, her eyes glowing as she conversed with her brother from beside the highledge. He padded over to see what was going on, and Streamflower's eyes lit up at the sight of him.

"Snowdrift!" She exclaimed, standing up as Snowdrift went over to greet them. "Me and Mosspounce were just discussing who would be going to the gathering tonight. You and I are on the list!" The gray she-cat beamed joyfully, standing on her toes as she lightly touched her nose to Snowdrift's. She lowered her voice to a whisper, unable to contain her bubbling excitement. "He almost

didn't let you go — but I convinced him!" She giggled. She rubbed her forehead against Snowdrift's muzzle, a purr rising in her throat.

Snowdrift pulled away from her, an awkward smile sprawled across his face. "That's great." He mewed, shuffling his paws. He'd forgotten entirely that tonight was the gathering, but he didn't exactly want to tell Streamflower that.

"So, Streamflower, would you like to eat with me?" He asked, lifting his blue gaze to look into her yellow eyes.

Streamflower bobbed her head up and down in a nod. "Of course!" She replied, her bushy tail lifting into the air. She glanced over at her brother. "I hope it's fine with you that I'm going to eat with Snowdrift. I promise I'll talk to you later."

Mosspounce grumbled an okay, and watched through narrowed eyes as Snowdrift and Streamflower chose a piece of prey from the freshkill pile, walking over to the side of the clearing to share. Snowdrift caught the gray and white tom's eyes, but quickly tore his gaze away from him, feeling a bit unsettled at the cold hatred burning in the depths of the tom's green gaze.

# Chapter Twenty

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Water dripped down into* a small rabbit's burrow, light sifting through branches that were bare of leaves and reflecting off of the small falling drops of water in a bright shimmer. Mouse's brown and white fur steadily rose and fell, his small muzzle buried beneath his paws. A splash of water landed on the top of his head, and he stirred. Another droplet landed on his ear, and he lifted his head, irritation rising in his belly.

He blinked as his eyes adjusted to the sunlight, and in a daze he lifted himself to his paws. He shook out his fur, scattering scraps of soil onto the floor as he pulled himself out of the burrow, his fur rubbing against the loose earth and clumping together. The snow was ebbing away to reveal bright green blades of grass sprouting through the ground, water pricking at the tips. Mouse flicked his gaze in the direction of the leafless bush his mother had told him she'd be staying at, and he spotted her gray form between the twigs, her flank lightly rising and falling. The kit shook out his fur once more before padding confidently towards Mist, his tail high in the air.

"Mist." Mouse meowed, prodding his mother gently in the side. "Mist, wake up."

A few moments skipped by, and Mist raised her head, her vision blurred before finally focusing. She stretched her jaws open in a yawn, her whole body shaking in the brief moment, before closing them and looking at Mouse. "What is it?" she mewed blearily, stretching to her paws as she was shaken with another yawn.

Mouse's throat suddenly felt dry, his mouth parted as he contemplated over whether or not his mother would listen to him. Finally, he croaked out the words, his ears pinned back against his

head. "Mist, d-did you have a strange dream last night?" He whispered, shame heating his fur as he avoided Mist's gaze. After no response, he pressed further. "About following the brightest star?"

Mist looked at the kit with unreadable blue eyes, something flickering in their depths. "Perhaps." she replied calmly, an eerie stillness filling the air. Finally, her shoulders loosened, sagging down as a tiny smile made its way onto the she-cat's face. Mouse tilted his head curiously, his ears pricked to their fullest extent as he awaited what she would say. "Yes. Yes, I did." she paused, looking back to her kit. "How did you know?"

Now eager to continue, Mouse leaped to his feet, his tail wavering back and forth in noticeable excitement. "Mist! If we follow the brightest star, we'll have a home there! Darkblaze — Darkblaze told me that he'd visit you in a dream so you'd believe me."

A frowned creased upon Mist's expression, and she sat down, wrapping her tail tightly around her paws. She scooped Mouse closer towards her, and he sat down by her feet, staring up in attempt to see her reaction.

"I must ask, Mouse, who is this...Darkblaze you speak of?" she questioned.

"He's a cat who visited me in a dream. He said he comes from a clan."

Mist nodded slowly. "I see. If this *Darkblaze* truly exists, do you think he'd mind visiting me in a dream? Last night, all I was told was to follow the brightest star. It could just be a dream. I saw no cat, no scenery, nothing. It was just darkness, darkness and a voice."

Mouse's ear flicked to the side, looking crestfallen. "I-I suppose he could." he mewled, stumbling over his words as he fought to remain calm. Why wouldn't Mist just believe him? Was it really that hard to accept his word? He sighed.

Mist licked his forehead, purring. "Aside from this, we still must continue forward and try to find ourselves a home. Come on, to your paws little one." She nudged Mouse to his paws, and he tucked

his tail between his legs as Mist gently nosed him along.

Why wouldn't she just *listen?*

# Chapter Twenty-One

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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"Mosspounce, Splinterpaw, Streamflower, Tortoisefoot, Slopepaw, Snowdrift, Leaningwhisker, Redspark, Yellowtuft, Beetlepaw, and Twigpool!" Pebblestar yowled, his tail thrashing as he stood at the camp's bramble entrance. "We're going to the gathering. Get your tails over here." The chosen cats made their way to the front of camp, the only sound aside from chirping crickets that filled the clearing was the gentle murmurs of eager warriors and the scuffing of paws against the lightly coated ground of snow.

Snowdrift and Streamflower padded alongside each other as their clan padded towards the gathering island. Silhouettes of cats could be seen jumping onto the fallen tree bridge and cautiously making their way across, fading into the shadows of the island that glowed in the full moon's light. Soon enough, ThunderClan arrived, however being the last clan to make it to the gathering. One by one, the clan made their way across the tree, water sloshing against the bark. Splinterpaw momentarily lost his footing with a startled cry, his paws slithering helplessly against the damp bark. His mentor, Mosspounce, caught hold of his scruff to steady him, helping the new apprentice regain his posture on the tree before gruffly turning away.

Snowdrift was up next, and easily he leaped up into the fallen tree, his tail held confidently up into the air, while also helping to keep himself balanced. Water slapped hungrily against the tree bridge, a bit of the cold liquid splashing over Snowdrift's paws. He shuffled forward, sudden fear clenching his heart. But before he knew it, he had made it to the other side, his chest's tightness loosening as he dropped onto the snowy grass floor.

Glancing back, he saw Streamflower leap down beside him, shaking out her fur with a light-hearted purr. "I'll be off to speak with some

other warriors." She meowed, flicking her tail across Snowdrift's muzzle in a playfully affectionate gesture. Snowdrift chuckled lightly as the warrior bolted off to gossip with others. *This must be exciting for her.* He thought to himself. *It is in fact her first gathering as a warrior. I wonder if Pebblestar will make an announcement on it.* As if on queue, the four leaders of the clans made their ways up the great tree, each cat settling on their own separate branch.

Dunestar, the leader of RiverClan, spoke first, her startlingly bright ginger fur ruffled lightly as she kept herself warm in the leafbare chill. "RiverClan is thriving this moon," she meowed, her plump and sleek pelt proving her claims to be truthful. "The river is flourishing with fish, keeping my clan healthy and well. I also have to announce the arrival of Blossomwing's three newborn kits, already strong for surviving so far into this cold season." Murmurs of congratulations rippled throughout the cats from the gathered clans, and Dunestar gave a short nod to Heronstar of ShadowClan.

The light gray dappled tom smiled warmly, before he began his announcements, providing news on the making of one new warrior, Owlsoar. Jaystar, leader of WindClan announced the good running of prey, before finally allowing Pebblestar to speak for ThunderClan.

The gray spotted tom stood on his branch, his golden yellow eyes sharpened as he let his gaze sweep amongst the crowd. "Our clan is stronger than ever. Littleshine has passed on, and our new deputy is Mosspounce." He growled plainly, keeping any information that may go against his clan silent. Jaystar frowned slightly, her head tilted to the side as her white and black fur rippled.

Pebblestar, without acknowledging the other leaders, leaped down from the tree. He summoned his clan with a flick of his tail. "ThunderClan, we're leaving." He yowled. The clan slowly gathered around the tree bridge, waiting for a few moments.

Snowdrift, like usual, fell into pace beside Streamflower, his tail entwining with hers. A few moments passed as Pebblestar counted the warriors, before turning and climbing across the tree bridge. The gathered warriors quickly followed behind their leader, hushed whispers coming from each cat as they discussed what they'd

learned at the gathering. Snowdrift and Streamflower however padded along in a comfortable silence, their fur brushing together and their eyes seeming to flicker in the other's direction on occasion, no matter the disappointment showing in Streamflower's gaze, for Pebblestar hadn't announced her making of being a warrior. Finally, Snowdrift shattered the quiet with a small meow to his mate.

"Streamflower," he began slowly, his tail trailing away from Streamflower's gray striped one. Curiously, the gray she-cat cast her gaze in his direction, blinking lightly as her ears flicked forward in a sign that he had her attention. Snowdrift slowed his pace before he continued, his tail swaying steadily. "I think we need to leave the clans," he confessed. "Lately I've been thinking about my dream — it seems much more like a prophecy than a dream. It was far too real, and, well, it had told me to follow the brightest star. And look." Snowdrift tilted his muzzle towards the sky, and Streamflower followed his gaze to a star that twinkled brightly, much brighter than the other stars against the navy sky.

Hesitantly, Streamflower stopped walking, Snowdrift following suit. "Continue?" Streamflower pressed, her whiskers quivering.

"I think StarClan wants us to leave, and follow the brightest star. Littleshine's death was a huge thing, and it doesn't seem right that she was killed — if that is what happened — so soon after that dream I had. It's like it happened on purpose. Streamflower, it was *us* who found the body, and it was *us* who know about the dream I had." Snowdrift swallowed, suddenly realizing how much he had ranted. Biting back his concern, he continued. "Streamflower...I want that greater destiny that prophecy told me of. I want to be happy. With you...and somewhere outside of ThunderClan."

A long silence followed, the lake lapping against the shore as the two cats looked at each other, their clanmates long gone. A few endless moments seemed to pass, before finally, Streamflower spoke, pressing her nose to Snowdrift's, fog coming from her barely parted mouth as she breathed out the words.

"Alright. I'll go with you."

**The journey has now begun.**

# Chapter Twenty-Two

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Mouse lay with his* head on top of his paws. The full moon glittered down upon he and his mother, Mist's flank rising and falling lightly as she slept. Anxiety twisted like a knot in the kit's chest. He knew that Mist was going to wake up, either having been confronted by Darkblaze, or empty pawed, denying all of what Mouse had told her about following the brightest star. He glanced up at the sky, the moon at its fullest that night as it rested lazily amongst millions of stars, and it illuminated the clearing he rested in.

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Mist's fur lifted as she awoke in an eerie clearing. Stars clung to everything around her, the trees, earth, bushes, and even a small mouse that skittered lazily along, as if begging her to catch it. Just as she was about to follow the temptation, she was interrupted by cat scent wreathing around her. "Welcome, Mist." A voice came from behind. Mist whipped around. Her blue eyes widened, before narrowing down as she spotted the black tabby.

"Who are you?" She snarled, glaring at the tom. The cat remained in perfect posture, his jaw flexed into a smile.

"You've probably heard of me," he meowed coolly, licking a paw and drawing it over his ear. "For I am Darkblaze."

Mist's eyelids fluttered, her mouth parting in shock. "So I'm dreaming?" She breathed, her eyes darting from side to side in the starlit clearing. *It would make sense.* She realized, eyeing the flourishing undergrowth.

Darkblaze dipped his head in response, padding towards her.

"You obviously know I'm here to assure you to follow the brightest star, just like your *son* told you to." He lingered a bit on the word son, blinking knowingly at Mist. Her hackles rose, her ears flattening as a growl began to rumble in her throat. *Does he know?*

But the tom continued, as if nothing had been referenced. "So you must do so. By following the brightest star, you are promised to be given a home. Not one of twolegplace, mind you. We don't need anymore kittypets than we already have, perhaps even less. Anyways, you will become apart of a group, a group of loyal cats who will put their lives on the line to defend both you and your kit. It shows promise, my friend. Major promise to protect the both of you." The black tabby tilted his head at her, his paw scraping lightly against the earth's floor.

Mist was silent, hesitance glittering in her blue eyes as they flickered over the tom. After a few moments, she reluctantly gave a short nod. "Alright. I will follow the brightest star with Mouse. He wishes to head there, so I will too."

Darkblaze appreciatively touched his nose to the gray dappled she-cat's forehead and she stiffened with a hiss. A blinding white flash emitted throughout the clearing. Then, Mist woke up.

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Mouse scampered back as his mother awoke, his yellow eyes growing round. "Are we going?" he mewed, worrisome eagerness fizzing in his paws. Mist shook away her sleepiness as she stretched to her paws, her tail quivering.

"Yes." she replied calmly, however there was an unreadable glint to her eyes. "Yes, we are."

Mouse let out a squeal, leaping in joy. "Great!" he exclaimed, his ears perked. "So we're following the brightest star!"

Mist nodded, and nudged him forward. She felt unable to sleep, and as she looked up at the sky, the brightest star seemed to stand out now. It was clear in her view, and looked as if it were calling for her. She and Mouse then began padding forward, Mouse

scampering ahead of her while Mist trailed easily behind. The she-cat looked up at the sky, blinking calmly. *This had better be worth it.* She thought to herself, the cool night air swirling around her as she and her precious kit began their journey. A journey to a better life.

**The journey has now begun.**

# Epilogue

[image]

**Edited ✔**

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*Pebblestar slept soundly in* his nest. Soft feathers that were plucked from starlings had been stuffed into the moss bedding, perfectly shaped to warm his fur in cold evenings. A shadow fell upon the den's entrance, and he lifted his sharp yellow gaze to see whom it was.

"Pebblestar?" A voice meowed. Pebblestar quickly identified the voice as belong to Mosspounce, and with a swish of his tail he beckoned the deputy into the den. Raising his head to stare at the young tom, Pebblestar watched through narrowed eyes as Mosspounce awkwardly shuffled forward.

"What is it?" Pebblestar growled, his lip peeled back in frustration to having been awoken from his slumber. "Any news to report?"

Mosspounce swallowed, his green eyes darting to and fro as his tail awkwardly lashed. "Actually — actually, yes. Yes, but, uh, I don't exactly know how to...say this?" He tilted his head to the side, and Pebblestar urged him on with an annoyed nod. "Streamflower, and... Snowdrift. They're gone. They never came back from the gathering, Pebblestar."

Pebblestar abruptly rose to his paws. "They what?" His voice was raised to a yell, and Mosspounce cowered under the leader's vicious gaze. "You're telling me that they didn't come back from the gathering?"

Mosspounce's tail spiked up, and he gave a terrified nod. "Y-Yes, Pebblestar." He bowed his head shamefully to the ground. "They're gone."

Pebblestar let out a snarl, swatting unsheathed claws over

Mosspounce's head and striking the stone wall, engraving a mark into it.

"I'm sorry, Pebblestar. I-I didn't realize into it was too late." Mosspounce breathed deeply, crawling back to his paws. "I will accept whatever punishment you have for me. I deserve it." He meowed quietly, staring at the ground.

Pebblestar's muzzle wrinkled with fury. "You will find them." He snapped.

Mosspounce perked up. "I-I will?"

Pebblestar scowled at the deputy. "Yes, you will. You will punish them. Severely punish them for disobeying me. Do you understand?"

Mosspounce nodded eagerly. "Yes, I understand. How exactly do you want me to punish them?"

Pebblestar's gaze grew sharp, and he grinned at the thought of Snowdrift, wounded or even dead. Involuntarily, Mosspounce shivered as his leader turned to gaze at him.

"Oh, I'll tell you how to punish them, Mosspounce."

**Finally. Finally, I'm finished! I'm so overjoyed right now - I'd never finished a book on WattPad before. What do you guys think? Are you excited for the second book? I'm already working on it, and do not fear! There will be action, lots more than there was in this one, because technically this book was just getting to know the characters! I will post an announcement here when it's been made, buuut, for now,**

**make sure to leave your support and how you felt about this one! Thanks so much for reading, and may StarClan light your path. ~ Kitt**

# Book Two!

[image]

**You read that right! Book two, The Brightest Star, has been published! Go and check it out when you're ready! ^w^**
**~ Kitt**

# Headcannons

[image]

**Btw, this is my first time ever doing headcannons! If you have any tips on making them, please tell me! Anyways, here they are. (I also know there isn't anything on Mouse or Mist. Their characters haven't developed enough to be added here!)**

• Snowdrift is one to two moons older than Streamflower.

• Pebblestar is a distant relative to Streamflower and Mosspounce

• Harvey has a large fear of being in the outside world, along with a fear of abandonment, which is the main reason he left with Miley

• Shade has a small case of social anxiety

• Miley is the daughter of a stray and a house cat, however she never knew her parents because she was adopted at a very young age due to her mother's passing

• Pebblestar believes that to remain in power he needs to inflict pain

• Pebblestar has trust issues

• Snowdrift and Mosspounce were best friends when they were in the nursery, however they drifted away from each other once Mosspounce noticed Streamflower and Snowdrift developing a strong relationship

• Littleshine had developed feelings towards Snowdrift, but she didn't try and progress in their relationship thinking that it would be wrong to be with him

• The cover was remade multiple times until the fourth attempt, whereas I was finally satisfied with the result

• The official cover is in representation towards Snowdrift's vision in

chapter thirteen, aside from the two cats in the front, whom are both Snowdrift and Streamflower

# Bonus Chapter (1)

[image]

***Note: I actually made this bonus chapter awhile ago, and I have no clue as to why I didn't post it until now. So...I hope you all enjoy!***

_____

*Darkblaze raced after his* brother, terror fueling his sprint. His feet kicked up clumps of grass into the face of his pursuer, and daringly, he cast a glance over his shoulder, to where Pebblewing chased furiously after the littermates.

*He's going to get me!*

Darkblaze spotted Springedjoint glance back at him. The black tabby felt hope prick at his chest, praying to StarClan that his brother would come back to help him. But to Darkblaze's dismay, the brown tom proceeded in running, his form flashing between the trunks of trees.

While he was distracted by the thought of his brother leaving him in the dust, Darkblaze felt his paw slip between a root and the ground. The momentum of him still running sent the tabby crashing to the ground, the breath billowing from his jaws. Fitfully, Darkblaze tugged his paw away from the root's clutches, his heart pounding with fear.

Pebblewing was right before Darkblaze as he crouched to the ground, knowing that it would be pointless to run. "G-Get away from me!" The black tabby hissed, fear evident in his mew.

Clearly, Pebblewing would not abide by Darkblaze's desperate pleas as he advanced towards the tabby, a cruel grin wrapped across his muzzle. "I do not accept disloyalty in my clan." He said coldly, bearing down on the cowering warrior.

"You're not deputy!" Darkblaze couldn't help but blurt out in the

midst of his blood chilling terror.

Pebblewing tilted his head, quickly knocking Darkblaze to the ground with a swat of his paw. He planted a paw onto the tabby's throat, still wearing his cold smile. "But I will be once Robinsprawl is dead." He conceded.

Darkblaze's amber eyes grew ever larger, and he began squirming beneath Pebblewing's firm paw. "Let go of me, you piece of dung!" He yowled, his claws ripping through any scrap of fur he could reach.

Fury lit like a flame in Pebblewing's eyes, and he arched his neck away from Darkblaze. The black tabby briefly stopped struggling, thinking that the gray tom was releasing him. But before he could so much as blink, Pebblewing smirked, and dove his bared teeth into Darkblaze's neck.

Darkblaze's senses were choked by blood as everything faded around him, the last thing he could see was Pebblewing's triumphant grin, his own blood smeared across the gray cat's face.

# Bonus Chapter (2)

[image]

Flailing, the white and gold she-cat fought to survive. *No! This can't be happening!* She internally wailed.

Claws lashed across her throat, and with a gurgled yowl the feline crumpled to the ground, gradually feeling the life slip from her bones as the gray tom stared coldly down at her.

"You're too weak to be in line for leader." The words whispered around her as she felt herself slip away into the claws of death, her last breath coming out as a heaving gasp.

Littleshine's vision grew dark, her thoughts swirling with terror. It seemed like forever as she remained in a void of emptiness, before finally gathering her senses and stirring. Her eyelids fluttered, her vision blurry and strange.

As the feline picked herself to her paws, her legs trembling and ears flat, she noticed that it was nighttime. The trees around her rocked gently back and forth, the small murmurs of unseen critters whispering through the air. Uncontrollably, the molly was shaking as she looked around. Her injuries stung and dry blood was caked over them. Snow drifted down from the sky and stars glowed through the clouds, twinkling kindly down at her.

Stiffly, Littleshine looked around, panic seizing her heart as she didn't find herself to recognize where she resided.

"H-Hello?" She croaked, her voice raw from a wound on her throat. Wincing with pain, she ducked her head, calming her breathing with a shaky sigh.

"Littleshine."

Bolting upright, Littleshine's head jerked up. She couldn't seem to recognize the voice that had spoken her name, and her fur rose as a

brown tom slipped out of the shadows and approached her. The snow that fell almost looked like stars glowing around the tom, and he padded forward with his head low in a passive gesture.

"Who are you? Where am I?" Littleshine hissed, backing away as the tom neared. Her movement was oddly swift and fluid, and it caught her off guard. Tripping over her own paws, her stumpy tail lashed as she fell to the ground.

With a small yelp of surprise, she scrabbled back to her paws, her ears flat. One of her ears was nicked and crusted with blood, and it itched as she pinned it against her head.

"Where am I?" She repeated, her voice more firm with a slight shake to it. She stared straight into the tom's eyes as he sat himself down a few tail-lengths away, his yellow gaze calm and unreadable.

Lifting a hindpaw to give himself a scratch behind the ear, the brown tom remained in silence, allowing Littleshine to grow more anxious and impatient. "Well?" She pressed, her stubbed tail beginning to flick to and fro.

With a reluctant sigh, the brown tom answered her.

"You're dead."

His words sent a shiver coursing down her spine, like cold claws digging to her bone and tearing it out. That phrase sent her world to a stop, and she fell still with her eyes wide.

"I'm *dead?"* She echoed, disbelief tainting her words and a discouraged crack to her mew.

The brown tom nodded. "Yes. StarClan is yet to recover you, Littleshine."

Littleshine's nose wrinkled, and she looked the tom up and down. "Then who are you, if you're not from StarClan?"

"I am Springedjoint. Although I am not in StarClan, I maintain a spiritual level similar to theirs."

Littleshine let out a hoarse laugh, her lip curled. "That's funny, I love the joke. Can you please stop now?" Her voice was bitter, and she felt unease ripple through her fur as her wounds stung.

In the back of her mind, she knew that Springedjoint was right.

*I really must be dead.*

Springedjoint, clearly understanding her thoughts, billowed a sigh.

"Littleshine, there's a reason as to why you have not been discovered by StarClan yet. I made sure to take you quickly, to allow your death to be less painful and so I can speak to you before they find out." Springedjoint meowed, his voice slow as he chose his words carefully, however not carefully enough.

"*Take me?*" Littleshine snapped. "What do you mean, take me?"

The brown feline stiffened, and spat a small curse beneath his breath. Inhaling softly, he gathered himself. "When a cat is suffering and near death," he began carefully, being sure not to meet the warrior's gaze through the snow between them. "Spirits have the ability to guide them to a quicker death, one less painful and full of less suffering. And that, I did for you."

Littleshine's limbs grew stiff, and a furious growl erupted in her lungs. It pained her, but she could not control herself as she snapped at the tom. "You made me die? I could've had a chance! I could've warned the clan about Pebblestar!" She yowled, her voice raising to a wail.

"Imagine how many others he could have killed? How many more he *can* kill?" The white and gold feline began to pace, her voice caught in her throat.

"Great StarClan, calm down!" Springedjoint exclaimed, darting forward and touching his nose to Littleshine's shoulder. The molly whipped around, snapping her jaws at his face. Springedjoint quickly ducked away, his eyes flashing with surprise.

"Chill out, Littleshine." He growled, taking a step back. "Let me explain myself, please. You were going to die either way, whether

or not I ended your life quickly or allowed your life to end naturally. I needed to speak to you before StarClan could find out about your passing."

Littleshine's eyes grew sharp, and she warily eyes the tom as he sat down, his shoulders hunched.

"I know you've had a bond with your friend, Snowdrift, for awhile now." Springedjoint said softly. "He and Streamflower are going to be leaving the lake, and they need a new kind of StarClan to guide them."

"Because you know Snowdrift, and you happened to have been killed, I want to know if you'd like to join this new StarClan. But keep in mind, if you do choose to come with us, you will be leaving your family behind and will not be able to see them ever again."

Littleshine's expression changed throughout the tom's whole explanation, to calm, all the way to furious.

"You expect me to *what?* How can you just throw that at me?" Littleshine yowled. Her eyes were sharp with fury and her claws sank into the ground. Her breath came out in sharp whisks of white air. "I-I don't *want* to choose! Why are you doing this to me?"

Litteshine felt tears spill from her eyes, and she fitfully choked back a sob, her lip curled as she tried to fight back more tears.

Springedjoint's face grew solemn as he met his gaze with Littleshine's. "I'm sorry, Littleshine." He meowed. "But you have to choose."

"You don't know what it's like to be killed by your own leader! Not even your own clanmate! How are you supposed to understand anything?" Littleshine cried, her stub tail now lashing furiously back and forth as much as it could.

Springedjoint's face hardened, and he parted his mouth to intercept, but the former deputy didn't even give him a chance to speak.

Littleshine shook her head at him, stepping back. "How can I just leave my family behind? How can I just abandon Snowdrift? A-And

Streamflower?" She was struggling to speak now, panic rising like a wave in her chest.

Springedjoint stepped forward to give the molly reassurance, but she shook him away with a scowl.

"I-I need some time to think about this. You can't just expect me to be able to choose between family and friends!" With a whimper, the warrior whipped around and vanished into the trees, Springedjoint watching as her figure faded from view.

# RotW Art Contest! (CLOSED)

[image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image]

This is being hosted on both my Warriors Amino account and here!

In celebration to officially completing this story, I will be hosting an art contest!

**"What's the contest about?"**

Well, self-asked question, this contest clearly has to do with the rise of the Weather series! In this contest, you wonderful noodles will have to draw your favorite scene, characters, ship, or even a scene you imagined to have happened that was not stated in the writing itself, including predictions! But the entry must include the characters and relevance to RotW (Rise of the Weather).

**"What do the characters look like?"**

I will be including a few reference sheets for the characters further into this post, along with links to better quality versions! If you would like to draw a character design that doesn't pertain to the design shown in the reference sheet, feel free to do so! I love to see what you guys imagine a character of mine to look like. ＜3

**"What will you do with my art if I don't win?"**

Even if you don't win, your artwork will still be used! I'll be posting all entries into posts dedicated to the RotW wiki entry on Warriors Amino, and this book. You guys will be absolutely credited and given a shout-out for participation in this contest.

**"Am I able to make multiple entries?"**

Of course! You can make as many entries as you'd like. But keep in mind that only ONE of your own entries can win!

**Reference Sheets**

Once you've posted your contest entry, make sure to tag me so I can see it and it will be included as an entry!

Thank you all so much for supporting me through writing this, and I'm eager to complete this contest!

*Please do not copy, trace, or highly reference somebody's else's artwork while making your piece. It has to be made solely by you!*

**Deadline : March 3rd, 2018**

**Prizes:**

***First Place***

• Two free shaded character scenes
• Free shaded headshot with a simple background

***Second Place***

• One free shaded character scene
• Free headshot with a simple background

***Third Place***
• One free shaded character scene

# Contest Results

[image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image] [image]

Before I show you the results, I'd like to thank everybody for their entries! I love them all so much, and I appreciate you guys submitting art for this contest. Make sure to follow everybody mentioned! <3

**• Third Place •**

Made by Aki_and_Kazi

You will be getting a free scene of your choice! Please comment for more details.

**• Second Place •**

Made by MJaeK on Warriors Amino

You will be receiving a free scene and unshaded headshot! Please DM me for more details.

**• First Place •**

And now...first place!

This was made by WarriorCatMoon335

You will be receiving a scene, and a shaded headshot! Please comment for more details.

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*Thank you all so much for entering! I loved all entries equally as much, and u, I really appreciate it! <3*

**The Entries**

Please make sure to give everybody listed a follow! They're all amazing and deserve it.

*The entries shown here are in order from when they were submitted. Other than that, there is no specific order these are listed in.*

ˆ Made by MJaeK on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by Night-Sin on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by Icestorm on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by Icestorm on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by Lily on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by gunsandcats

ˆ Made by Dappledrose on Warriors Amino

ˆ Made by Dappledrose on Warriors Amino

Again, thank you all so much for the entries! <3